Herder's Trails, by Esha Ray

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Herder's Trails

Chapter 1. Travelling for Fodder

Peahens and pigeons and feathers and ferns

Bamboo stalks and leaves

Branches and brambles and fodder

Cows chewing them gratefully

Chomping on each morsel

And converting them to cud

The herder girl brings them

Along with pots of milk on her head

As she goes to market

And walks back home

Bundles of kindle, firewood and thickets,

Partially gathered and for depositing in

The stables, barns and goat-sheds

Built of stern planks, some painted with lime

Some unpainted, but covered with moss,

nailed and pegged to one another, and

Pillars nailed with cross beams to form the frame of the shack.

A horse's whinny, a tremor of its hard thigh muscles as it pines to go trotting. Rizwana flings on its bridle and begins walking at its side, taking in the countryside landscape as it spreads out in-front of her like a quilt, a table cloth made of the many fragments of a floor made of many shards of coloured tiles.

First, the purple grey-green heather and bracken littered moor, with yellow flowers exploding dotting like mustard plants' flora, the earth clinging, springy plants.

Then the emergence of the gentle, earth swaddling hills with shimmering waterfalls sparkling down their rock faces in the distance, like cattle lowing and mooing, grazing and chewing among the fragrant clover and grasses, their hides the foliage and root covered rock faces.

Amjad's glittering bridle pulled at Rizwana's wrists, forcing her to run faster beside him, as his sweat, cold from his tortuous turquoise veins would not evaporate in the frigid air, became an embossed sheen.

Ah, dear horse, she said and leapt upon his saddle as she could no longer keep up. He galloped like a javelin over the knolly plains, his shod hooves beating the seemingly hollowed ground, because sounds like heartbeats echoed up from it. He had to stop when the land began to incline upwards though. The stream splashed as they dashed through the channel. Slipping and sliding on the mossy, algae covered stones.

They stopped, Rizwana disembarked, unearthed a fuzzy towel from her rucksack, and rubbed him down, then covered him with a blanket.

She had reached the house of Homaira, in the valley of the mountain range. She would knock and deliver the book to her faraway neighbour, so that the lady could familiarize herself with the textbook and prepare to teach her son.

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A snowy mountain peak, shining with rainbow colours in the dawn light. Beneath, alpine evergreens, juniper conifers, firs, quivering aspens, larch and beech, through whose branches the wind winnows as though howling in caves. Cascading rivulets fall among the steps of rock, hewn by the waterfall, into a temple shrine of the forest. There, the women go and worship, among the shrines of rock, winds, ferns and sunlight, veiled with their ragged saris over their heads, their children in tow as they show them how to gather wild berries, nuts and grains. Although they are forest women, they worship the Lord of the Worlds, the supreme, the majestic, the merciful the compassionate, who heals all wounds and makes bountiful the harvests of those whom He will, expecting that they share, schooling those whom He will, and who are faithful, in his laws and his ways.

A travelling Chinese Jewish family, its mother wearing a red veil of hibiscus hue, patterned with white speckles in lines, her face like a moon shining brightly in her kind, tender smile as she plays with her infant, making faces at it and cooing, showing animal shapes in the shadows. This, as his elder brother hops, leaps and jumps with his playmates playing rabbit catch in the dust among the tall, green and golden grasses topped with sheaves of seeds, arranged like a mountain, or a silver spring with droplets sprouting out on thin filaments.

They decided they wanted to play 'horses'. Avan said she didn't know how to play, so they taught her. One person, in-front, held the handles of a jump rope, in both hands, while others held on to the rope loop and followed as the first person galloped ahead. The others, three or four children, ran as fast as they could to keep up. Using one's strengthened muscles to spring about, one's heart thundering and breath flowing in to one's lungs in great gusts, was exhilarating.

Their mother built a spit outside to hang the cooking pot over the flames, out of three, long, drift wood branches, curving and tapering, lodged in the ground in sockets that she had dug and bolstered by the balustrade, sticks that held them together horizontally and tied together at the top by twine. In between the horizontal sticks that held the arches together, green sticks were arranged in radial spikes, on which the cooking pot rested over the flames. When she found the green sticks smoked too much and began burning, she hung the bucket with its handle on the arch.

A young girl turning somersaults among them, supple, strong. The ones who watch knowingly, with smiles like lemon or mosambi-juice squeezers, the laughter sprouting out through their eyes.

The entire mountain is like Gaia, a half-aged farm maiden or nomadic herder, or a wandering shepherd girl, or a forest mother, her dress the bright evergreens that clothe her, making up her skirts, pinafore and veil, mixed white, grey, brown and black flocks for her long, tangled, braided hair, spring pools reflecting the sky, for eyes, and the carved reddish slate and sandstone for cheeks, forehead and arching crags for noses. Golden eagles for nose-rings perching on the precipice of the crag with their nest, feeding and tending their babbling, cheeping young, white and turtle doves for earrings, guttering and clamouring with turquoise and purple-sheened necks, undulating as they strut among the springs of water, bathing, spraying, drinking, like silver tassels that cast their light over all that behold them, reflecting the afternoon sun on the meeting of friends.

The space between the walls and trees in the afternoon glows blue, a divine light.

Her hair was brown in the silken strands of the elm tree bark, or reddish lava flow rock, banded with bitter sour tulsi, papaya gourd and okra, cardamum, dandelion weeds, Gul mohur and bamboo.

Her skin was the rock face of a hollowed out, brown granite crag, her dress the cobbled patchwork quilt of a land of square fields of farmland, green, yellow, brown, and red, from when the red rice was in bloom.

Her eyes were the glossy, dancing koels on a forest lantana tree calling for rain, her nose the sickle moon of a midwinter night. Her cheeks the reddened, fallen maple leaves of a mellow, autumn forest, her teeth the pearls strung on a necklace, begotten from the oceanic depths where iridescent oysters feed.

Her words were the singing arrows, canaries that fly through the air, chattering and cheeping, imploring and instructing, praising the Lord and building up those she knew with studied, measured wisdom and temperance.

Marine walls shore up waves and foam and the great crashing of the sea against the coast. The foam, which glows phosphorescent in the evening, or moonlight at night, is a pearly white set of caps on the greening, greyish-bluish-brown wedges of roaring water.

Families holiday on the walkway behind the wall, enjoying the dash and touch of sea mist; the foam that flies in the air and rises, lighting upon their cheeks.

This is not an assembly line. This is a family, a school, a band of friends, a troupe of acrobats.

The Lord is kind and immensely good. He'll never let you be satisfied with anything less than your best self. Never try to gain an advantage or take anything more than your share, for your hand from his hand may slip and you may be forsaken. Remember to hold fast to your Heavenly Fathers' hand and be grateful for all he gives you.

Red lotus, brick, and vermillion, faces, cheeks reddened by hard work in the sun at the peak of noon day; a face washed in the tap of public use; carrying a broom of grass, bulrushes and twigs over the shoulder, hair of the eagle's wing and flouncy pony tail buns, shaded, smoky; a forehead like the glaciers of Kangchendzongha. She walks on calliper legs; her bright, sunlight, beige, mustard yellow kurta billowing and wrapped around her sturdy frame.

"Would you like a drink of water?" she asks Manthan, and he accepts, both of them refreshing themselves as they sit in the shade of the building they have helped to sweep and mop clean, sitting on a grey, moss-coloured, cement box of a water tank.

"We don't complain about the work we have to do, but wish that others would acknowledge the fact that, we need to eat, too."

The three foundling siblings, Yasinia, Sheila, and Aref, who lived in a hollow of the mountain of Zeynab of the Panjshir range, thought, "What we are is largely a collective question, the creativity, understanding and hard work, stemming from individual agency we take to shelter the interests of our group, are some of the things we, as a family, as a group, as a village most thrive on and treasure and combined with the structure of pan community land ownership, equality and mutual work keeps us grounded."

The herders ask, "O peasants, what is it you're thinking, wanting, and how can we bring them about?

"The clean man's blessing is to stand on the window of the cliff or wherever and feel the wind coursing through his sinews and flesh, the cold glassy mountain air, the sharp chafing keen twist and watch the sunlight's hourly progression over the hills and the leaves."

Wind whistles through my teeth and sighs like wheat a-winnowing – say, say, or if you say not, then wish with all your heart.

They had to prepare to pick the grapes of summer on other's farms, take the others' goats out for grazing, and do the May cleaning of their huts they had missed because they had been so busy harvesting the grasses of spring with sickles for the livestock to eat, knives that blunted themselves ever so often and had to be sharpened by itinerant sharpeners. These carried the equipment on bicycles they determinedly and doggedly drove uphill. Since there was so much work to be done this season, the foundlings put their heads together with the knife sharpeners and made a covenant with the light, to rise early and look at every slant of light through the window, which came, swivelling and screwelling in

A Steeping of white, and pouring in bursting bands, funnels and torrents of gold and rust and rose, at mid-afternoon, evening and sunset, through the grilled windows and patterned glass pane, a rare thing in their spare lodging, made precarious with the wind

Single, double, once, twice,

Open the door and close it thrice

Their eyes are shining like buttonhole mice

Water and honey, milk and ice

A carved door, sold at a price

We want to know how and why

Yasinia shut the door, walnut coloured and lacquered, carved as though from a trellis of intricate buds and branches, sprouting leaves and shrivelling fruits. Her brown toes swept, carving bear tracks on the dirt floor. Like the river sprite, the one who had retrieved the woodcutter's axe from the water, testing and rewarding him for his truthfulness, she shook the drops from the curtains she had washed, invited and cajoled the wind to fill them like billowing clouds or swelling sails, hoping that they would dry before long.

There was no waiting for Ahmet, there was too much fun in the airing work. She scurried about it in the nipping wind. As she did so, she kept an eye on her sister Sheila from the window, wringing the drops from the long blue cotton bedsheet cloth they sometimes doubled up as a curtain, that Ahmet said belonged to her, twisting it into a rope that curved like a twisting serpent over her strong wet shoulder, burning her hands once more like a mast rope, anchorage from the icy pail.

And then Sheila was in the room yelling that the goats were fled, then revealing that she wanted to leave to follow another pasture so that she could get the stinging herbs for the new nanny.

Wait! Cried Yasinia; Have you tied the bells round your ankles? She worried that the tottering, gambolling kids would lose her, as she watched their retreat, watched as they fled.

"At least let me wash your ankles of the duck-dirt, the gosling feathers and the vapours of the fen (marsh)!" Yasinia called after her, but Sheila was already gone, hugging her freedom to her chest, the herd close following like dogs or like foam chasing a sea's stormy breakers.

"Today is a blessed day," said Sheila to Yasinia. "I think I will find many things I have been searching for." She stood in the sunshine, twirling her flute between her hands and fingers as a violinist might twirl his bow or like a baton, or a lock of hair.

A peter's wink from the wizened old man who was her grandfather, and who was climbing with his sheep, a relative she had fought with jokingly in not so recent times, for having chided her for being seen outside so often.

"If I don't go, then who is to feed these goats straw that is so expensive from the people who have land to spare to grow fodder, if I don't take them up to the mountain to graze, so their milk tastes sweet to us and nourishes their young!"

"As if I don't know about all that," he said, "Go granddaughter, safely," he gave her his blessing, with a gesture that signified an amulet which flew to her on the flying cold wind. "I wish your brother would go with you, but he is needed to till the land." Sheila knew she was now protected from the blight of tripping on the crumbling, flinty stones or soil, and also from that of having strangers gaze upon her.

"Simple kettles gyre and jimble

Hay and locusts fire and thimble

Weaving their noses through the leaves

To make a grassy sash and shirt."

She set foot on across the mountain, picking her way across the stones and the cobble stone and quartz chalcedony that was scattered among the tangling weeds and grass that held the loose soil and prevented it from crumbling. She knew that she would have little human company today. But she was on her way.

Yasinia knew the girl was getting out of hand; yet she knew, as the clothes she was hanging up on the line outside in the pouring sunshine that could just as easily turn to pouring rain, blew and bucked against her working frame like the many foals charging at an inky wind, that the batin, what was inside of Sheila and the other young must be let out, find expression, doors left open, for once, now that it was summer; that the fever must be allowed to rage, ashes of the forest fire to consume the grasses that had grown wild and tangled in the yet untilled groves, brambles choking the stone channels of the autumn melts, rushing and streaming like vapourized snow over their smoothened edges. The edges of the canyon were scrubbed and pitted and pumice-like from which moss and bulrush could take root, and tangling thorny bitter gorse, honey locust, prickly Japanese barberry and wild grape and ivy vines. From then on the autumn crops would grow, in the ash from the weeds and the saplings and everything that had been consumed and burnt. And Yasinia was always searching for a sufficient metaphor for spirit enervating flesh and nerves and bone, like strands of grass and branches of shrubs, lit by the flames, one which did not leave out the angels, *al malaeke* and the power of the force fields generated by the mandala of one's living frame.

Glad to venture out at first light, Sheila had collected the other goats from the village members who paid her to be their shepherd. "Fwump!" "Oh, dear, what's that?" She was skirting along the trail, and suddenly she felt a furry thing bump against her calf and ankle. She couldn't turn around. When she craned her head, she saw a kid goat, just about to break through teenage, black with white socks and flecks near its ears and horns, baaing insistently.

"It must have runned from the butcher's block," she said to her-self. "Oh, courageous one, you deserve so much better than that." She then integrated it among her flock, it capered and nudged among her other goats, which licked it on the neck, ears, muzzle and ribs. So it was, the stray goat had started following Sheila today, at the valley pass, as her cousin Wajma walking with a cat in in her arms, a source of great jealousy for Sheila, a cat with a bent tail, that everyone said it had been born with, and that they said and all could see, that "it likes biting it." Bereft of pets, it had seemed she herself had had an almost magnetic effect on the goat, and it had also found each hair to have a corresponding blood-vessel surrounding her heart, its running pulled at her heartstrings like a net made of rope stretching as it pulled a barge on a river.

Gazing at it, with lake-grey eyes that reflected the pools of water resplendent with sky in her two buckets slung across a pole on her shoulder, she claimed it for her own.

"I take you into my fold of animals," said she. "And you, come night, will find a home in my livestock shed." She took the bells from her own ankles and fastened the string onto the neck of the goat.

"O, Goat of waggling ears and tinkling bells,

Of clipping hooves and clomping jaws,

Follow me, follow me! Choose me.

I will lead you to pastures of jade,

Studded by garnets in violet flowers.

Mountains, spreading like tablecloths in spring houses of cedar,

But you need not care for drapes and curtains, free creature, although I weave them,

For I will spare you always

From wolves and from human harm."

It was in the tradition of the area, that if any creature asked you for refuge, you did not deny it, even at costs to your life.

After a day of studying her geography textbook out on the pasture where she was grazing her goats, come evening, Sheila stormed into the hut, hair flying into her face, chaderi askew round her mud-splattered cheeks. "See this little one with me?" she asked Yasinia.

Yasinia, nodded, waiting for her to say more. "It must be a runaway from a butcher's block," she told Sheila. "Keep it, nourish it, and it will enrich our own flock with its gambolling and with its bulk when the time comes to form a bulwark against a wolf that decides to attack your herd. You watch over it, and mark my word, your generosity will not be in vain."

It was time for the evening du'a, and they all were eager to put before the Lord what was in their hearts, Sheila that her new goat would be able to stay. "But, come and wash," Yasinia instructed her. Her face was like the wizened, precarious crag of a cliff, cheeks like hollow canyons into which cataracts plunged. Her brow was jutting like the promontory over-looking a harbour, and her eyes like staid bejewelled snakes, studded with turquoise, emerald in the tangling, curling whorls of drying grass, or like whirlpools into which glaciers shatter, crashing and breaking, melting, whittling, foaming, becoming translucent, transparent, rather than a thing aglow. Her shawl was black and sooty from the many fires she had stoked, streaked with chalk from the basins where she had stood with Ahmed at his carving, and threadbare from the times she had pulled it about her shoulders in the skinning cold.

Sheila had once pulled all the knots from her own hair, pulled them off with a broken toothed comb. Blowing like a wild bear's coat, spreading with burrs, thorns, leaves, upon the wind. "Come, come inside," Yasinia said, almond eyes beckoning, "I will remove your knots for you."

Sheila rushed in, sturdy calved and strong boned, petulant as ever, poked her head in through the sooty sheepskin curtain, said, "I will let my hair be combed, but you must first promise me that we'll break red ochre on the altar when the time comes as a sacrifice for the safety of all the goats," Yasinia pulled her loom tightened so that the threads would not snarl, and got up, said, "Yes," quietly, "We will.' Straightener her shawl and rose, gestured for Sheila to sit with her on the woollen mat. "Let's sit," Yasinia said, Sheila adjusted her baskets to the left of the window, swept the ground free of husks and bean clippings with the fringe of her chaderi which she had taken off scarf-style and now trailed from the back of her dress.

And now a second new goat, Yasinia had produced, smilingly, from the shed which had been left in their care.

The woman Yasinia, her sister, was loving, and her very frame was charged by compassion for young people who yearned to find themselves, and trying to use their resources or position to help those in need, like Sheila wanted to adopt that little goat. Yasinia's black hair in a bun like a rose, a diamond glimmering at her nostril, her arms long and muscled by work, her feet fragrant, she said.

"Perhaps our little friends will be like the frontiersmen Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who fought alongside each-other to rid our neighbouring areas of the British rule during those times," Sheila to her sister said as her sister Yasinia lovingly braided her scarecrow hair that otherwise whorled like a hornet's nest, "And become the guardians of the other goats. It will be a leader, and with his sharp teeth and granite hard hooves it could even fight and wrestle with wolves and mountain lions, and win every battle it fought."

"Perhaps the owner will come searching for it tomorrow," said Yasinia, gently. 'And you will be accused of stealing."

"If they agree to stay with me, I shall be happy," said Sheila. "I'll not ask for more."

***Sheila woke to songbirds cheeping in the morning, a cold glassy sky, lit by a lemon-like lantern suffusing the greenish tinge of the horizon, rising to an arc of blue in the East. A frantic calling, like rain plinketing into a gathering vessel, persistent and shrill, scaling up the climbing air as though blown from a flute. She had peered out of her window, eager for the sights of the new winter day that had dawned.

She dived out of palette, clattered down from the bunk, washed her face in the tub outside and quickly brushed her teeth with a neem stick which she chewed to freshen her mouth, and quickly she darted to the shed.

She hugged the goat, weeping. "No one took you from me," she said. The goat capered and licked her hand.

A heron, swimming on an azure lagoon, a tern standing among the mudflats, bulrushes bristling, housing flapping ducks which spray droplets of frigid water in flying arcs, rain falling light upon the marsh like an army of needles, shooting stars from heaven, the rocks on which they alighted slippery coated with moss and blue green algae. Grass standing straight and tall, rivalling the rosebushes and evergreen pine piercing, triangular, scraping the sapphire dome of the sky.

Prayer mats of velvety moss and bryophytes with starry flowers, curling branches curling with stags and with antlers, sleeping on a pillow of mushrooms. Tears of dew adorning petals, briars pricking the finger, thorns emerging from leaves. Whorls of dragonflies charging, buzzing towards the sun, butterflies fluttering in clouds. Ivy chaining geese, flapping and honking and splashing and swimming across the rippling waters.

A monkey rappelling, a swan climbing, geese gliding upon the ice; a camel winding a horse whinnying, prancing upon the ringing floor.

An emerald field, a sapphire welkin; haystacks piling matchsticks burning in dun towers, stars twinkling like Chinese firecrackers, flying in domes and arcs, purple hills and a sea blue moor, forests leaning sleeves hanging, ivy climbing the trunks blithe bark chaining ducks that suddenly began to call and sing, an immediate barrage of pipes, wheedling and whistling.

"The Kurds are coming," said Shiela's younger cousin, Wajma. "Oh, the Kurds are coming! Someone do something! Let's make us a pot of fresh baklava to share with the nomads when they come. Or rather, let us make naan and dal, so that everyone is fed and no one goes hungry."

"And I shall mend my *chaderi* and sew some new mirrors into it," said her older sister Philomena. "So that I might give it to a friendly dowager that might arrive among them. Or shall we tear up our old cloths and make quilts of them, so no one freezes when Natal time comes," she said.

"What Baclava, we've hardly got naan enough to eat," muttered Aref, their older brother under his breath, but he extended some grass he had cut yesterday on his sapling expedition to feed the pen of goats their morning meal. Under all her enthusiasm, Sheila had to agree that the second suggestions in each case had been sensible, although she liked the whimsy of the first…

She knew that up in the steppe, the days of winter were upon the nomads, filled with snow, churning with blizzards, rolling with storms, awash with flash floods and simmering with sun reflected in icy lakes, forded by frozen streams.

A vision.

The dusky rose of their cheeks foreshadowed the sunsets they would spend together walking and watching the stars appear, telling tales of hidden interactions of the elements: gnomes, pixies, fairies and djinns, brocades of painted wrought iron among the hedges, with spirals of light whorling from the skies onto the glittering leaves, in a simulacrum of dust and steam, a pure halo of angel's wing feathers, shed hoops and crowns of light.

The ribbons of flowing energies were the emanations of fairies' flight, buzzing, shearing, tulle and hair, wet, fizzled, sprayed for weddings, kept away from candles lit, auspicious for future life.

A several boats sailing out of the mooring, shimmying, fluttering, capsizing.

When she carries the loads on her back, she seems almost a bear, with turquoise anklets round her browned feet, strong as a tall, turbaned, wrinkled man.

The walk up the mountain is a steep trail, a hard, exhausting hike, with rocks and streams that could wash your feet clean of all the dirt from the lowlands, fennish vapours, and muddy soot and grime of the wetlands.

Strong, fluttering feathery leaves of the gulmohur, stencilled shadows on the dark, dappled air, spending with raindrops.

Needles of pine, acorns of lime, sour olives, folding betel leaves, mouth reddening paan. Not good for the body, but women chewing it anyways.

A woman comes down the slope, clothed in a tunic of beige, her hair wrapped kosher in a black scarf. "I shall teach you how to kick addiction, she says. 'And how the bark basket is woven. The seed laden stalks harvested and used as fibre to weave the baskets."

She unties the anklets of her sisters, places the trinkets in her small bag.

The bride had to shake the amulets tied by her cousins onto her bangles onto the heads of her single cousins, blessing them to be married soon.

A central mountain fire, burning, twirling, the grass sparks and sizzles in it, popping and curling, the green blades aging and smouldering the dry leaves, sparking hot red embers like pokers, comets razing through the air.

"It's so cold already in this barren land, though not so lonesome anymore, now that we have three goats of our own." Sheila lived with her brother and sister, and stared out of the window, wishing and wishing for a family to visit, a mother and a father, two daughters and perhaps a son to share the cold time work with them. There was grass to be mown with scythes, cut and baled into hay, so that the livestock could be fed during the long winter, rolled into their curious Kyrgyz style barns, built of driftwood from rivers, fallen cypress boughs and something so posh as baked clay shingle.

Of course, the land could not have been truly barren, for Sheila's village was smack in the middle of the nomads' once in seven-year route, which they traversed to graze their flocks of sheep on the fairly abundant grasses and sell their shorn wool to the inhabitants there, and to trade their milk products and woven goods with grain.

Ahmet mended his boots and put them out to dry in the smokehole near the fire. "If you accept allegience to God, he can lead you anywhere. Pray for a good listener, and that you go to pasture with her."

As you walk beside the lake, you hear the immense shattering sound of ice breaking; spring is here; the larch and the aspens, bare for the winter, will be clad gladly with green buds of leaves again; the storks, ducks and swans will return from southern climes and cluck and quack and bray beside the water, singing their songs of balmier weather.

Make sure you keep putting one foot in-front of another with trust in the Almighty to lead you where you should go; and to do what you should do; the tent strings of the tabernacle have to be kept tight and sound; the stakes in the ground, the purple and blue embroidered covering patched when it is tattered.

It is not always big things that count; it's little things, consistencies that count as much. The daily housework, the gatherings at the end of the day, the few kind words, these all make meaning and solidarity in a life.

The stone that the builders rejected, has become the cornerstone.

Never underestimate the power of the poor whose moral force overcomes everything, every obstacle, every difficulty in the spiritual path to meet and know God.

***

The day had finally arrived and the band in its wake. There were five families, with as many girls as boys, all wearing bright chaderis or headscarves tied at the throat if they were girls, and charming embroidered or white lace skullcaps if they were boys, looking like pretty cardinals on desolate branches in the heart of wintertime. They chattered excitedly amongst one another, looking with sometime eager, sometimes faraway eyes at the bushes and grasses poking up from the snow in Nuristan country. They were used to the frozen tundra of the northern plateau, where one could step and never lose one's heel's grip on the ice, where one could run for miles and never get tired in the chilly air that brought the blood to one's cheeks like snow or tree bark staining with wine. They studied the red ants and beetles, surging up the late-tree trunk's height in armies and veins, commenting on the colony of the insects and how they had mapped the tree out in all its passages.

The local teacher, Philomena, appears. "Come children," she says, her face looking down at the new train of school age kids, one of whom is painstakingly wrapping his breakfast naan or flatbread, into fourths and stuffing it into a rough cotton tote, she waits for him to finish quietly and then leads him and the others to the field, while some of the children amble about, chatting and prattling in twos and threes, watching the clouds and pointing at the sky to trace the birds' flight, radiating mischief, subterfuge. "Let's throw the ball in the group, or otherwise play dodgeball."

"Throwball!" says Imtiaz, the leader of the group. "We like bouncing on our heels."

Irfan says: "While I field the lobs and the globe upon my fingers. I shall give you a spin ball, my first throw, tossing it into the air as if I am throwing a spear, or launching a flying saucer."

"Alright, let's see what you all can do," said Philomena, both chuckling and challenging. He threw but the ball landed only a few feet away from his weak arms. The boy looked at the ground disappointed. "Vroom, vroom! The engine was just starting." He picked it up and hugged it to his

chest and wouldn't let go, while the other children surged at him; tickling him to try to get him to drop the ball.

"Stop! Stop, children, you must maintain discipline in a game. And don't attack one of your front, it's not constitutional."

'Let me show you," said the Aziza. "How to spin a globe upon your finger. That is the first step towards lobbing spin-balls. You pick it up in your palms and place it onto your twisting right hand, squinching the little fingers to your palm, raising the index fingers, and letting it spin on the finger tip. Your arm has to be very steady, and best to have your nails cut before you begin."

She tossed him the playgroup nail-cutter she kept in her pocket.

'Did you get the inner meaning of the parable she told you about the throwball?" asked Wajma to the older students. "It is only through knowing ourselves and activating our true potential of mind, body, will and emotion, that we can ever hope to conquer the world, in a different way than most people think."

She adds: "The way of knowledge, the way of devotion, and the way of works, must be followed equally in order to unlock our true potential and equip us to act on it. That's what the folding of the three fingers means."

"It is the whole being that has true exultation when it rises from its slumber to perform the tasks it was meant to do in the world. That is the nature of true power, the search for joy, true control and reigning in of the selfish instinct."

The lesson dispersed; there were many preparations to be made with the new settlement.

Sheila stood among the tall rushes and watched them get oriented to their surroundings for a bit, then went up to them and spoke to them, asked them where they would be staying, whether they had enough poles for their tents and enough woollens for their bedding. Of poles they said they had enough, but of blankets they said they would like to buy some wool to weave with, for to shear their sheep would be unwise in this weather, as they did not want to give them exposure.

As they had just arrived, their poles were slung over their shoulders, and their bedding and tent cloth wrapped into bundles that they had strapped to their backs. Slowly, they laid down their burdens and unpacked them, unravelled the frayed woollen blankets and woven upholstery and dried goatskins from their bundles. They began to clear the grass from the ground, marking the earth with knives, cutting out sod around the outlines of pole cross sections, and fitting the sticks to the carved niches, leant them against one another and tied them with chords and vine-like ropes, coiled from jute which they had traded for to grain.

When the framework was complete, they spread the goatskin covers over the network of poles and pulled these and the woollens taut to form a turtleshell dome.

While the nomads were working on their tents, Yasinia and Sheila worked in their kitchen for what they would all share for the gathering feast. They were strengthening their arms, lifting the sheets of browned sugar and wheat dough and nuts and laying it in the oven, a kiln like tandoor where the blocks would cook and roast. Yasinia boarded up the chullah with a clay lid and blowed into the bellows like an enormous west wind flattening the reeds and sending the fire shooting to the left, and the flames began to devour the dung cakes beneath.

When they went out to air their hot faces, they saw that a girl stood in the doorway of her tent, her arms akimbo and her hands on her girdled hips, looking curiously over at Sheila and Yasinia as they peeked out of their doorway. She put her hand on her chest, said: "Avan is my name, what about yours?" Sheila yelled across the divide in Persian "Sheila. Would you like to take our livestock to the pasture together?" she said. "Yes, friend," she said. "What's your name?" "Shiela. "Let's all three of us

go together!" The girl laughed and they all laughed, and put their finger to their lips. "Shh, not so fast," she said. "I have to stay here to mind a fire, understand?"

"I see," said Shiela. "We haven't cooked or packed yet for the day, either."

The girl was browned a caramel and her nose was like a leaning tree in their backyard. She wore a light blue scarf and her eyes were like gems of shining amber. Her hands were like wizened branches already cracked, like opening oyster shells.

The girl said, "Come, my lodge is welcome now," and she showed Sheila how she peeled garlic and put it into a pot with dried herbs and milk, put in the cracked wheat they had bought on trade for cheese and stirred it to form a thick stew.

Then she took a bowl of milk and poured it into a fine-grained mustard cloth, smooth and cool as the slabs of flooring in a mosque. The cloth was held by a circular frame, and when it was full, she twisted up its edges to tie together and squeeze out the moisture, and leave a block of viscous formaggio. "When it is set," said she, "We will go to market with the cheese we have made."

Turin and Gibrail were scurrying around the tent, playing, peeping into the doorway, hoping for a tithe from the cooking vessels stewing over the hearth. Sitting outside, Sheila showed them how to wend blades of grass, stolons and runners into a daisy chain without flowers, waiting for Yasinia to bring out the baked sweets; and Avan gave them bits of dried meat to nibble on, which were as tough as rubber.

No one ever spoke of scarcity, though it was certainly there. Pride in whom they were, or their families held them from announcing their lot, or perhaps it was that although there was almost, just about enough, they knew others who had to struggle more than they did.

Turin says: "Let's play. Do you have any toys?

Gibrail says: "Yes, let's play. I don't have any toys. Have you?

Turin says: "I have neither. But we have got sticks and stones and dust. We could make a shack and blow a storm over it and shiver in it and rebuild it again."

Gibrail: "We could make a cenotaph for the wind."

Turin: "And thus trap it?"

"Alas! The wind cannot be trapped. It can only be used by sails, windmills and flying seeds and such like."

Take care not to fight, boys, said Khala Yasinia from out of the window, as she stirred the pot in her house.

"We're just discussing things."

"Oh, good."

"Let's be windmills!" Turin exclaimed, his arms outstretched. Windmills, grinding grain, like they do in Holland, using the force of the breeze to break the wheat.

He leaned this way and that like a seesaw, twisting his arms like an eagle, wheeling in the rays of the sun, paring cloud from one another, like blade pares an apple.

"Now I am a helicopter!"

"Don't be one," said Gibrail. "You know what they do to us."

"True," said Turin and dropped to the ground, hopping. "I shall be a hare then."

“And I shall be a turtle and race thee. But by God, I shall win.”

“No you won’t. We’ll tie.”

“No we won’t. You’ll win.”

They raced first, crouching and crawling, and Turin won, despite common sense suggesting that the crawler should win. Then they stood up freely and ran like free men, from the courtyard to the fountain and back again, panting and laughing like snarling baby leopards and rolling in the hilly snow.

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“Let’s not talk down to children and students all the time, let’s try to understand where they’re coming from, stand in their shoes a little. Then we will be able to meet them at a mutually respectful middle ground. Not a truce, but a collaboration a combination to extract the best from both sides and make both sides stronger as a result.” ***

The Banking Tide of the Lodestone-Ocean Cannot Be Contained With Nets

The Queen of Peace wears greenish-blue garments, the robes of an Israelite woman, and a white veil; her hands are lilies of love and justice which gleams golden in the sun, as her halo, like snow-dusting on moss and algae on the barnacled hull of a ship; where the shells are the coins she wears as a crown of her veil and hair; like the twelve stars of David, representing the twelve tribes which her son will judge on the last days.

Her skin is the brownish peach of peanut shells, pecans and apricots, soft and dewy with a peach-like furze. She is beautiful beyond anything in this world.

Cypress trees blow in the background like howling giants with the wind through their leaves, their hair, branches and twigs whacking like bamboo stalks falling down a rocky mountainside or being sparred against one another in a jousting battle; or like wind in a flute; searing, breathy; with an immensity and echo choking the throat that sings with dirt and grit.

Blue bells, lavenders, larkspur and lupines cluster in tiny pools and key-like groups under the towering trees.

Raspberries, blue berries, with tangy flavour and tiny seeds which spice and fizz up their taste between the tongue and teeth, make a gift of the winter; atop drifts of snow, they look like toppings of ice cream bowls, filled to the top with the cows’ creamy bounty.

A butter churning jar with a ladle or an ice-cream maker’s cranks to turn, both turn the fluid, the viscous, just like the fluidity of despair is turned into hard resolve to do good with the whispering of the Hail Mary and the turning of the rosary beads.

Slants of light crossing and beaming, sparkling, alighting on the pews of a church through a colourful moulded stained glass window, with a picture of Jesus, the Master of life, shepherding His lost lambs.

Sleighbells ringing with a fierce, delicate ringing tint and tincture, like that of silver chimed with brass or copper. Deer running through frozen rivers in early spring and late summer; the glacial floats breaking into cold shards on contact with the deer’s hooves or hard haunches, hind legs.

The stripes glistening like gold-streaked beaver or mink, or otter. An arch of stained glass above it, with rapturous images of the saints, a branch of sorrel, ivy and thyme and coriander, drying, fragrant, quivering atop his Bible.

For the lord will rebuild Zion, and restore her glory. This does not come to mean the land of the Israelis any more than it means the spiritual land of all those who live righteously, who follow the teachings of Moses, Christ or the Prophet Mohammed, who may be Hindu or Buddhist or Taoist or Confucian, Bahai or Animist, or Dreamer, or Sarna or Communist

Drifts of snow scattered on the sparkling green grass; stray snow flakes drifted, glistening atop the seed heads and long bending blades; like a dragonfly's wings atop its jade green body of a flying grasshopper. Lemongrass, gathered in swoops and swoons, dried near the fire and hung near the smoke-hole of the tepee for fragrance, beauty, bounty and good fortune.

A bride's hennaed hands, intricately carved with paisleys, tulip flowers and mango, guava and amla fruits; the red marks the residue of the dark green, cool, leafy smelling mehendi alta paste. Her wrists hung with silver bracelets, her fingers ringed with copper and gold, her anklets chiming as she walks with the ghungooroos, because she is a kathak dancer. As she stamps and dances, yellow green and black water-proof feathered creatures fly into the air like balls of flame, squealing and squawking like pigs and parrots, or rabbits, up-to the rafters of the barn house, like scarlet clad cardinal birds flying atop autumn burnished maple trees.

A mist or a fog, rising from the lake, the mystery of the eternal love of the sky for the earth, who swathes her in veils of gossamer cloud vapour.

Make sure you know the beauty of the outdoors and of languages. A peacock feather, dancing in the wind atop the head of Krishna, the cattle herder who meets Jesus atop the *giridhara* mountain. Jesus, with his nail pierced hands, shakes the rough hill man's cowherd hands of Krishna, and they embrace. Krishna said, "While I stood upon the brick, you were on the cross. I revere you."

***

A starlit evening, like the pall of a veil decorated with sequins and silver brocade thread in networks of diamond patterned shape. A needle like a sardine leaping from the ocean. A thread of moonlight. Lakes rippling with the passing breeze and my footsteps as I wade.

Heed, said the racoon, her familiar animal, the ancient practice of fasting. It will clean you out, scour you as if a person had taken a scrubber to your blood. All your arteries and blood vessels purified. All your nerves and tissues sanctified, bathed with the redemptive sacrificial blood of Jesus' crucifixion, suffering and the love he harboured for us; bathe you in its holy light, readying you for life.

"Write!" he says.

Joints of sinew, joints of bone. The arteries spreading blood and nourishing the whole body like alluvial rivers nourish the countryside. The religion of Abraham is like a tent-cloth quilt of many colours, like Joseph's' rainbow hued robe that his brothers were envious of and stole and muddied and by which they pretended he had been attacked/stolen by a wolf. A patchwork of many colours, I said. And the worshipper kneels on it and prays, like a prayer mat. Sometimes the cloth is converted into a sheet carried around, all its four corners held for almsgiving.

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The iron-brass (bronze) bell carved with pictures of eight spoked wheels, lotus flowers and cow herding women carrying bowls of rice pudding, bodhisattvas sitting under a jewelled tree of enlightenment, suns like the wheels of Dhamma and Samsara, moon like the agricultural sickle, reaping rice, wheat, alfalfa and masur dal, *champa* flowers and mohua blossoms, used to make a fermented wine, intoxicating and invigorating, sweet, when drunk, by which the limbs of the women become wild in dance and the men lose their strength and poise.

The bell was a deep, light, mellow metal cow-hoof, rhinoceros' horn (questionable), pearl thunder sort of sound; amber gem, moonstone crystal tincture vibration that thrills with sound.

"Hail, Mary, Queen of peace; blessing, tending flocks of geese; sheep and goat flocks that are tied with fetters and bells; to keep them safe and sound and well." The artist's sensibilities show him views and feelings, which he must try to describe, but ever must approximate. Send space reading to anna.

***

It is midmorning in Darjeeling.

A golden sun, crimson clouds. Grass with a gold and silver lining cropping up between the white flagstones of the path… A shimmering, translucent mist coloured maroon and lavender in the midday heat. A winding road leads up to the cottage house, its walls made of mud and its roof of dried grass or hay thatching, with thimbles and hairs of platinum rumpled. The fence around it is made of fallen deadwood logs and branches, roughly made, improvised like a cattle shelter or a stable for horses.

Always look out of the window when your eyes starve for light. Beyond is a sky so blue it is like a robin's hatched enamel coloured eggshell or a blue jay's cloud flecked evening speckled wing feathers, spreading itself and flying in the balmy translucent dust carrying load of wind.

Mary, the Queen of peace is the harbinger of joy as we seek to imitate her journey. The immortals of the air, of the sea, of the rotting wood of the docks and the salty sea spray that dashes the beard and cheeks and foreheads of sailors and makes their eyes misty, as they churn out their old sailing songs.

Sebowisha, the sighing riverside rushes; *lakdi*, the bending branch of the sapling, banyan, the dewy, gutting leaves of the tree of a thousand, winding, hair like roots, each standing in its place on the banks of the stony channel of the river, in which my friends and I wade and wander, our feet bare and walking on the pebbles and shards which pierce our arches and soles, as though we are wayfarers, fakirs walking on nails.

A weathervane, spinning in the threadlike wind; spooling, creaking, bending, shivering, made of elder wood. Shiela hangs her third pink scarf on it that has been knitted by her rough, shaggy pashmina wool, smelling complicatedly of coriander, bay-leaf and cardamum, cinnamon and asafoetida which she mixed with the vegetables she cooked and stirred in the kitchen stove, while she wore it to protect her from the blasts of cold drafts that came through the window ajar and the threshold of the closed door.

Copper and brass bells, tasselled onto the tails of her braids, like the tail of a horse or its mane. Her shoulders are clothed with a red sweater folded over, inside out and her skirt, printed with paisleys and with elephants, her feet small and carved as though of yellow ivory mixed with redwood pine. She chews sasafrass as though it were bubble-gum, drinks green tea as if it were water and picks the food particles from her teeth by the *sal* tooth picks she barters for butter in the local grocery store.

The maiden of the glaciers and her friends wander up and down the hillsides after their work in the trellised barley fields is over. Her friend Pema, with the long shaman-like straight black sheep wool like hair, or like the wing feathers of an eagle spread on the breeze it buffets, or like the jagged crags of night stealing on a peachy and lemon like spilled egg horizon, she ties back in a black braid adorned with a white jasmine in the back. Ka Hsaw Wa with a face illumined by a smile like lightning, quiet and hard-working, hard to draw out, but affectionate with his relatives, helpful and sincere with all he meets. They were busy tying up the last few baskets they had made, woven of thick corn shuck grasses dried and treated with ethylene. When they took them to the shop, they always heard horror stories of how the refugees and craftsmen were sometimes objectified by the tourists, and how they had to endure staring and flagrantly disrespectful comments by the Hindi

heartland folks or the mainstream Indians, who considered Nepalis, Tibetans and North-Easterners fair game to carry their loads or pick their tea or cook their food whether man-servants or maid-servants.

"We're not afraid of taking care of our own households, but when we have to manage yours' as well, you must treat us better than you treat your animals. It's only fair. We are the human life-blood of your meals, your clean houses, your swept roads and your driven buses. We are not driven snow, broomsticks or machines. We are Buddhist and human, far more realized human than you, ill-natured beings.

Sea gulls, herons, storks and jackdaws, who live near the expansive sea; and ocean of waves and foam on which many ships sail with cloud-like sails and lightning like mast rigging. Will we ever step beyond the sand onto the dock and the boat? Sometimes, it is true, we must be generous and forgive; make tents of clothes and libraries of simple tales, of old folksongs and stories of common people.

Do not pick out your eyelashes. You need them. To keep dust out of your eyes, for simple, non-cosmetic beauty and to look 'normal'.

The ugly duckling was once told by a cuckoo, after the duckling had been bullied by the geese and ducks, that he was talented and should take to organising. Not only did he really have this in his blood, but in the pain of his experiences.

Do you understand the word "goat"? with its shaggy hair, trusting eyes, butting horns, nimble legs and cloven hooves; its gentle, plaintive baaing and the warmth and fuzziness it brings to those who herd it?

Ghaghara cholis, nine nights of intense dancing with dandiyas and lamps, lanterns of delight, drums, cymbals and magico-religious songs. Around a flickering fire fed by coal and firewood gathered from the forest floor and hacked, hewn from bamboo poles among the thickets, and deodar and *sal* groves which shed their drying leaves like gummy tears or peeling onion skins and paper reams appropriated by the people for the festival of Christening of the ten-branched baobab tree.

Flocking pigeons, poultry smelling, white blurb shitting, downy feathered and stiff winged with grey blue and black striped wing feathers, preened and carved, smoothened by the slipstream of air, through which they surge, flutter, nose dive and careen, settling on building ledges, beak-ing, snatching brambly twigs and sheaves from ledges of the community garden; guttering and cooing. They feed their young regurgitated grain from the scattered, spilled stock of the go-down, or the *kabutar khanas* spread by wandering Sufis who take an interest in the feeding of these creatures.

Lavender, larkspur, petunia, begonia, languishing in a heap of watery flooded garden, whose grass and tomato plants

Continue

I am a starfish, a simple, five-legged, rough-skinned creature, used to improvising food from algae and phytoplankton in the tidal pools. I stay and crawl and splash in the warm sunlight, the cool sea winds, and breezes, the lap-lapping of the wintry tides which carry all kinds of kelp, algae and sea anemones shooting from one place to another like water balloons.

The flounder fish, puffer fish and sting rays pass under me, lurking on the sandy surface and crawl away to the coral, where my friends work among the castles of polyps and subsist among the colourful towers and seaweed. The water is green blue; translucent, with sunlight shining through it in yellow dallying radiance, sometimes like light through a prism.

When the cold sea wind blows over me, after the tide has receded, I get a delicious cold feeling within and shiver all over my scaly hide. God has given you visions to tide you over the misery. Take them.

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Their walk of evening took them through several mountain-valley passes, a couple of middle-class (income poor but materially prosperous) villages, gated by fences of bleached driftwood from the coastal towns with whom they had bartered with milk and butter to buy as they did not want to fell their native trees.

Frozen solid, icicles, stalagmites and stalactites hang like curtain dressed with sparkling jewels of turquoise, jade and ruby geodes shot with green cuprous gold leaf vein in tortuous rivers across them, dripping calcite onto the pool at the bottom, feeding into the underground stream.

These icicles are my mothers' earrings. Her head of hair is the mountainside covered with long wild grasses, fresh and drying, felled with salt and salt licks which deer embed their tongues in and make bowl-like dents, to get the tang of the necessary rock-salt sodium chloride necessary for neurotransmission and the healthy functioning of the brain. When the wind tumbles the branches of the fir trees and grass, she laughs and tosses her head in affectionate merriment for the wild child – the wind's -- hand on her head. Her head cap is a woven peak of white snow and black rock iridescent with crystalline snowflakes, reflecting rainbow colours in webs of light.

I will not cut my mother's hair except for need to feed the goats, cows, oxen and yaks, as well as the hybrid *dzo*. They too are children of the Mother Earth. And the milk which she gives, muddy topsoil which nourishes food crops of wheat, barley, dal, apple, pear and apricot, is of her generosity which she cannot but give to help us, a product of her union with the Father, sky spirit, which gives us rain.

The thunderbird awakens in the baobab tree, above the straw frame cactus and wicker basket furnishing wild shrubs, unfolds his black and blue and purple wings and gives a cry which plunges into the heart of the gathering evening's fiery, melting lavender dusk, like an arrow or spear piercing the pith of night and dragging it up by the root; a cross between a squawk of a goose and the braying of a donkey and an eagle's desolate call.

You ask: how can the grass be both her hair and the food crop which yields and which we eat? You see, a spiritual manifestation that is conceptualised one way can be true in one relationship, and conceptualised another way can be true in a different relationship as well. Like the human mind can be likened to an onion, with many layers and aspects. But an onion is also a fruit of the earth. At the same time, the universe or earth in God's hands can be likened to an onion, with different fields that interact in an integrated manner. So an onion has three meanings and metaphors: the human mind, a fruit of the earth, and the universe itself. While the human mind is a microcosm of the world, both it and fruits of the earth are children of the universe. So we see that although like gives birth to like, that fundamental differences also appear despite essential similarity. Emergent phenomena is the best phrase I can find to describe the layers of the onion metaphor effect.

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An offering. A silvery crown of light atop the pearly peak of the mountain, at the crack of dawn. Many cracks, fissures in the mountain ledge, rock hewn out by the roots of pine trees, ferns, mosses; crags overlooking the river. The mossy peak, iridescent pearly.

Below, the azure stream gushes and sparkles, prattles and gurgles over newly water hewn pebbles, smoothened with the water's soft, nurturing touch. The sickle moon rises above, like an earring in a nomad woman's earlobe, hung above her collarbones, who rocks her baby against her famined bosom.

The pigeons flock and gather on the rocks near the cave, where the ascetic scatters rice for them every afternoon. Some of them are grey-blue like mottled marble, some white like blazing limestone. They roost, peck and flutter, singeing the air with their beautifully crafted, feathery netlike wings of

hollow, planar bones, like phoenixes rising over with the rising of the afternoon light, painting all the landscape in dappled, diamond-like, dallying brightness, the crepe paper malachite pine-veridian green tree leaves rustling atop their grey brown branches, the brown black of the mountains' rockface and the red of its withered soil, the turquoise-grey sheen of waterfalls sparkling in the sun reflected and the iridescent snow of the peak, the crown, the crag near the cloud.

And above all this the eagelian condor flies and calls its young to follow it in a fight. Why has it emerged from its nest just now, when it will not hunt, if not to feel the nodding of the jet streams of air through its swooping wings and down feathers, injecting energy and power into its shoulders and bosom? Or to teach its young to sense the pulsing flows of the world?

***

Rivers running like roadrunners, banners, scarves, trickling oceans. Rustling water shining turquoise; tinkling, guttering, flying over stones and pebbles. Moss green coloured hills in the sunshine, glowing with unearthly mists and light. A rainbow hangs above them, clinging to the cloud, fluttering like a dove or a sunbird or a kingfisher above the fields.

My sisters come and gather the stash of raisins and cashews like swans gathering chicory seeds and hickory nuts, pinecones and the popping fragrant grains of grasses. They step barefooted through the undulating, satiny water of the streams which slip lightly and chimingly over the pebbles, gravel and rocks and stones.

Thou art the etching of a rose in my thigh bones and their junction with my feet, a wrought iron wax statue, a candle in the shape of a flower, fed by my bone marrow.

The growth of a coconut palm tree, like a fountain, spraying like a resurgent spring of grey green fronded leaves.

Snarling up the shadows and dallying radiance that prints beyond my rainbow eaves.

Pigeons gutter, fluttering, geese glide a stuttering on the broken ice, the lake to shatter and splice, and root for fish, so callousish, to dry with spices nice.

And many tents of bulrush mats and bamboo poles erected on the bosom of the hill-side, shine with drying grasses of which they are composed, like a mermaid's hair, a bear's lair, hidden with bushes and rhododendrons.

***

A fire, fractalline of descending rays, sparks and haloes, lit by moonlight, hurled by Diana or Chandni or that orbed maiden, with white fire laden, whom mortals call the moon", like lightning, alighting on crop stubble, tree belts of cypress, gul-mohar and baobab, sal and sundori, sinuous, grey trunked, shimmering leaved in the broad daylight.

Elephant ear leaves, like drying plates, banana tree fronds, like Pleistocene grasses.

Have you been happy? Have you been occupied? Have you been friendly? These are important questions.

The landscape bathed in silver. Rooms of corn and wheat plants, rising up in the fields with their pine coloured sheaths of grasses and braids of grain and seeds, looking full and wholesome.

Red alta marks of clay on the ground, the feet of the earth. Bonfires of hay to commemorate Makar Sankranti, along with peanut cake chikki, how do you reconcile the Hindu festival with caste justice, once you know that Hindu civilisation was made possible with the unjust enslavement of the Dalits and so called lower castes to perform manual labour and nightsoil clearing?

And how can we valourise postmodern states of being when these necessitated hazardous and demeaning occupations? Some modernity is evidently necessary.

A star-tracing from a nectar-grove, corn grove, barley field, to grape vine, melon, blueberry barberry gooseberry trellises to harrow, shuddering stalks, un-shucked ears, bulging hay piles, and pitching stacks of peaches.

Pyramids of treasures, acorns and persimmon trees and orange trees and pyramids of the sun, and ripening branches and baskets of apples, rows of ripening out and emerald paddy rice, cut in mountain temples, hewn like staircases, shingles of a checquer-board.

A shivering hair across my face, a shivering shadow, a flitting ray from his face, a very daring arrow, shooting spear, a falling snowflake.

The clouds laden, cotton, bursting, rolling, blundering, swilling, roiling, shivering, snivelling, shining, yearning. The bridal veil of their incandescence of their sweeping drapes, turning and fluttering, shivering and pattering, billowing and wrapping, the lady of the jug and pitcher carrying patties of the melon, the tangerine, the sunlight rising dawn … a shard, a spring, a resurgence of vernal fountains; a discharge of rain, a current of water; a millpond of rising, boiling hail, a sieve, a confectionery of sleet, a posse of woven baskets with violets, sweet-peas, peonies, cherries, and arrow-sheaves and wheat.

Pears to him, songs to my saviour, lady of the dragonfly, bootstrap, honey and hyssop, clover, lord of my fatherland, lord of our meadows; lord of the hinterland, lord of the bellows.

Fire nymphs; her eyes were lavender, closed against the filtering sunlight, with downy flakes for eyelashes, darting shadows against her peach fuzzed cheeks, the cheeks themselves like apricots dried, roasted apples or like pearls untried, rusted by the abundance of flooding and the harshness of Saule's fire scorch her.

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She is a wandering gypsy; her spirit flows like the river, like the wind, and no one can contain her. She is not like a genie in a lamp; but like a soul which the lord has set free and loosed on the world to breathe life and hope into it.

She wore a red scarf torn from a kite that had gotten snarled in her window on Makar Sankranti. Her green eyes shone like leaves of a banyan tree reflected in a mossy monsoon pool.

She was sad, because her father wanted to marry her off to a man twenty years older than her and her wanderings would be at an end. Therefore, she had run away from home and was living with her best friend, in a tent they had put up in a sal forest; with a frame of bamboo poles, covered with old torn bedsheets that her mother had suggested she take when she had let her mother know she was leaving.

"I'll collect the water," Husna said to Rohina as they warmed their bird-like frames in the crackling, scalding, orange sparking fire outside the doorway of the tent. So that they could boil water on it and cook rice and Husna could go and work as a maid in a rich person's house come morning.

The Heron rose above them on hang-glider wings, circling and swooping and crying, underlying their desperation. Rohina rocked to-and-fro on her haunches, listing the things Husna's step father had done wrong.

First of all, he stopped you from going to school

Second of all, he rationed your meals.

Third of all, he's trying to marry you off to an aged person.

In what way have we not done the right thing by running away?

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A cypher, a snowflake, wrought from glass

A diamond, an ice berg, melting like wax

Grass growing, green and gold, swards of meadows

Peppered by ebony trees, choking with shadows

Blue green, pink purple, smoky paths

Winding in webs through the wooded forest

Deer and fawns grazing, gazelles drinking from streams

Flecked with sunlight, that pours in glittering beams.

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Silver bells and gold rings, copper buttons, adorning the feet of the bride. She dances like a palm tree, swaying in the wind. Her hands are painted with designs of henna, in paisleys, curly ques and arabesques, like arbours of grapes pouring from trellises, and showers of rain in autumn, causing the red leaves to fall and wither in apple cider-like puddles on the cold, frosty ground. Cornucopias of squashes, maize, beans and chillies.

She taps her feet in a tripping, horse-like rhythm.

The Sun is risen, the Sapir Whorf hypothesis proved wrong,

The moon reflects the glint of the morning,

Even in a powder blue, evolving dawn school day sky

A pendant, a nomad's earring hanging,

On the pall of Miriam's veil.

All those who strive for the good, must strive for love, and not avoidance of punishment

All are one and one is all, and mysticism seizes the subject in action, in fasting, in writing and imagining.

What is more, the dynamic knowledge of the spirits of nature and toil, till the earth and erect crops, trees and fodder and firewood.

Animism and Judaism, Islam and Christianity do not have to oppose one another, when we realise that Christ suffers in his mystical body for our wars and injustices, that he has come, that we might join our sacrifice to his, and receive the blessings to live more abundantly and grow in character.

Chosen fasting is cleansing, but involuntary hunger can be disabling. Hunger can be a teacher, but it can also be demeaning.

Work with the hands and body are sacred, and the work of the pen as well.

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Bringing her up, bringing her down; she stood in the doorway, saying "Marmi, you don't wanna bring Marmi down, do you. Don't want dull things in your head." Stick figure silhouetted against the cerulean blue, sunlit hair askew in the breeze.

And so she was smoking in the city now, with nothing else to do save cry. Well, no, it wasn't quite as bad as that.

When she saw him, the skin around her eyelids crinkled, like tiny ripples on a doldrum sea. As said before, when she saw him, caverns opened within her chest, channels of storms of well-lit skies, churned upwards within the bellowing vacuum of thunder, the sweetness of soot and ash in the swirling nectar of rain.

It is a great boon that he has given you, to know how to act, to proceed from the hollow in your center, wherever you go. Then after one undulation, like that of a snake, you are ready, like a mill poised for wind that rises over her to warm grind the grain, cut, soften the flour. For who, with fingers like petals, hair like spun gold or raven's feather, blackest moonless night and eyes like silver reflecting lakes that shine greyly in the hanging mists of mist and rain? For that is what the day is, the endless spinning of the sun's rays between night and night, which though one be in a cell, we ought to be grateful for? Emerging like a resurgent spring, a sapphire pool, foaming up the earth, the drone of the drain of its whirlpool and the squelch of the mud? The sap rises in me and shakes off the somnolence, puts its hand on my shoulder and shakes me, says, "wake up!" disturbs my soul. And I toss, and cleave asunder from my sheets, and I wonder then what, O giver of boons, all I want is your light, your warmth, I already feel; you whose every movement is a dance of great skill and a step of grace and ease. The first rays of the afternoon sun, piercing through the wet wool of the blue cloud. All I want is for my parents to be young again; my soul is his soul; I exist as a twig, a branch, from his sturdy yet supple stem?

The wandering sage muttered to himself, waving his arms and he turned his wrists and waggled his fingers in an incantation, his eyes half closed, half open to the piercing light:" What spirit am I, what waiting shadow, or shy/sly beam? What creature is this one who seems lost in misery, led and enervated by a fairy spirit, an agate gleam, a sunny stream, a trickling brook, a laughing scream? A threaded web, stealthy and hidden, yet frank and obvious as the midday sun? I do not know your face, O God that I cannot look upon, but I have felt your touch, sensed your fingerprints, that by which you sustain me; who am as thin as the skin on the milk, as flowing as the cotton robe upon the billowing line, it turns and dips, it hides in the waving fields and then soars, touching down once, twice, to snatch at the ground like a wilful kite."

The mendicant continued, uncommented upon and unnoticed by passersby: "And when I feel the softness of the fabric upon my fingers, the sweet straightness of the grain, I wonder, how was it spun in misery?" But when he saw how the children played, careless of tumbling, rising from bumped knees, he did wonder that the threadbare cloth held such trickling joy, such chuckling madness, and such tranquil calm/sweetness, "as though it be the velvet night that hangs to catch the shooting drops of the stars," which he knew to be their tears.

It was such that she was grateful for even the smallest sliver of light in her eyes or a small stroke of bright sky, dust free, wispy illumined building across the golden winnowed air in the distance, undulating palms, fingers fluttering like starry feathers on a bird's neck or hung from the scalp of an Onondaga brave.

The black raven's wing, the peacock's train, slate calm, rainbow glossy, its eye like the sliver of snowy sky, or heaven inked with grey drifting cloud

The air is heavy, laden with moisture, break forth inky gossamer wafts of wool, dripping tufts of unspooled sheep's wool, break forth to shower drops, arrow darts of shimmering coolness and light

The mendicant spoke, raising his cheeks to the sky " O bright heaven, blue light, clean like the enamel on a robin's egg

O slanting yellow marmalade light, warm as an egg's yolk, gleaming as an egg's white, clear and green gleaming

The woman answered, singing softly: “Warbles waft from my whistling mouth, like a mating call of a quail like a dove cooing her young ones to calm when the dusking darkness hails them to rest.”

A sturdy salmon, leading the school tripping from crest to crest, trembling form wave to wave, smiling from stone to stone, looping themselves from mossy lith to mossy lith, the several herring bones of a chameleon lizard, the flashes of an angelfish fluttering, weaving down a kelpy stair, watering down the weedy, gulping brook.

This is what Yazmina said to her younger sister Layla:

O, generous soul, be happy and set thy feet light upon the path! May your hair, soft brown like muddy rivers, like milky tea, like dun cows and gentle peahens, drift like feathers above your neck and your ears, like thatching on the roof of a muddy shelter! Yet you yourself are better than shelter, your very casing, your frame, is the lure of the wheel of the sun’s might; it shines on all it meets, scatters itself and bids the wheat-grains pierce their shoots through the crumbling earth to meet the welkin yurt, in a flowering serpentine knott, a knight’s pledge the cross on his scabbard, the emerald tangles emanating from a lady’s thimble. Flashing needles knitting a shawl from a tangling of sapphire threads so deep and vacuum cold, effervescent and blinding as a sweet smoke of turquoise incense.

When she woke in sorrow of a morning she saw the sky outside egret grey with a touch of jay or iris blue, a flute’s plaintive strains shining onto her stricken face, a mercy tunnelling to her, sun’s rays bursting cracks in a slatted roof or latticed wall.

She came to me in a dream last night, fireflies a-gloam, that as I stood at the whitewashed balcony streaked with blue, roses of night in my hair and my limbs wrung through with a long day’s labour

He smile was bright, her hair red, she said, he tries me, and then he wrings me through, and we have at it again once more while yet there be no light.

She said, you don’t have to worry, you can do, in one frame tasks meant for two, for work will refresh thee, and when thou art spent, the night is a drink, a draught that would quench the thirstiest, parchedest throat, and yet imbue the strength of jasmines, allus new

Layla said: “I was washed clean with tears; the smoke and dust had fled me.” Strong summer days, Yazmina brought them, shining like the wind on your face, rushing like the brilliant waves. She says, “Sweet, sweet, flowers are sweet, the smell, the feel, they swiff and they wheel;” looking at Yazmina, “Proud thou art, while I am a reel.” Steel, steel, steel yourself then Layla, and onions will un-peal, pungent water burst.

Hail to your way, reverence to your laws of being

Let me not be too familiar yet, o emperor of the universe

But guide my actions, inform my ears with your whispers

O lord, as a kind rider, harsh, proud, murmurs to his mare

One sees and then one stares; what way is there to of innocence

Only lead me as a sheep to its kind shepherd, that I may see only beauty in your passages, those of slate and those of crystal.

She wrote and then she was silent, she read and then she was still. Where are you, o silent wanderer, that we may find you among the clamouring signs of the road?

She was already roasting the flatbread, spreading it with sour goat's butter, the aroma of parched wheat like seeds popping in the summer's heat, the leafy grain and the sour, the fresh and the pungent, the sweet and the bitter stirring, boiling, bubbling up to make good medicine

His flat cheeks, mountain crags of desolate daring

May you see stars in roses

And kisses in mountain ravines

May the scent of the jasmine cling to your wrists

When you lift them to your eyes to pray

May you see straight and hear tall

Like the poplar, may the rain sway in your veins, vines, like a long slender, bending pine

Running like streams, like torrents, washing them clean

May the moon follow you in every lake you pass

May the sun be your companion

May she swoon with love as she wanes

And bathe you with serenity as she grows full and wild

He wanted respect and you wanted love

Or maybe we both wanted the same thing

And she told Layla of the blessing of a nomad woman, single tailed and running, stung with dusty yet bright feathers falling in hoops and in lacquered hilts, sloping diadems, rinsed to crowns, even crowns one found around the bullock's pen, even yaks of eleven stroked hooves of stallions roundsimple, stuttering, guttering, licking renowned.

A triangle of light slanting from the gliding gull's wings, the swooping of its flight, the beaks and talons and gizzard in a ring, the slanting of the dawn beneath its webbed treaders, the angling of the noontide beneath its rubbed nostrils, the crackling throat that sings, the horn that swills and laughs, the song that pipes and spins.

They saw the waifs standing, sitting, running around in the corner. The waifs paused, they raised the jump rope in question, debating whether to make it a wreath, or a snake or a ladder to heaven, or a jump string for the game of blue bells, or rather the only symphonies of a cymballed orchestra, in the end they made it to pull the clock tones chimes, the handle string of a toll, the swinging of a chasing puppy, or the lasso of a straying cow, that these could be harnessed to harvest clear clean milk and undefiled butter ringed with caps of lather and thimbles of foam.

It was a lake around which ladybugs swept, and dragonflies flew on gossamer wings on the flight tails of iridescent dawn, on the translucent slivers of a mother of pearl,, and the limey wash of a lagoon morning time, the slatternly moss of a decaying brick wall, the grimy crust of a falling cabin, rent and ragged, lonely and abandoned, unkempt and forlorn. The prince ran around the edge of the lake where he often practiced spears-man-ship, sharpening his gaze and the homing focus of his eyes, in true line with his nostrils, across the shore, as he looked brightly and boldly, brazenly, thinking of cutting bulrushes to grind into some fodder with dirt and seeds which he would mix into laddoo balls.

Then came a girl by, braiding her hair by which crew like a flashing streak of lightning a strand of canary burning lock, bight as the moon's fingers casting itself into a summer pool, a lagoon of spun hay and rippled molten water-cresses, larkspur and platinum, or a bunch of grapes or a posse of plums, Pearls pears and acorns almost beneath her haunches. She was eating the wild manna of the desert lily and presently came down to share it with him.

Look ye to the ravine, he said. They scrambled down the arroyo, and there they sat for hours while the sunset, eating and dancing to warbling songs which they sung, and laughing and gurgling, until the girl was so chalk full of grit that they stood and twirled in the dust, , shied like curving horses, , leaped like whinnying stallions, coursed like baying mares and cascaded like tumbling snakes, until they came tumbling down like ripening beans and peas and lentils on a long and curving stalk, fitting its tendrils into every crook and holding fast,

The girl then went to a cavern, dimly lit and by a lantern which she held, and painted everything that she had seen. A canary, a sparrow, and egret there with her, lead her way, and half a dripping brush where high where her arms could not reach where she stood on her tip toes. She painted a golden boat and a sickle moon and many people rowing and she painted banana trees and coconut palms, lilies and larkspur growing at the side of the lake.

And in the spring season when the deer's baby fawn wrapped its caul like the incense of Ambareen, the fragrance of a birthed fawn, around her like a dolphin dragon fork tongued snake, she held it fast to her chest like a bunch of leeches, which it bit as if it were a camel nibbling on pomegranate as if it were a bat flapping and fanning on the freckles of a flecking papaya, flies scuttling round bananas and the speckles and stripes.

The lady of the lake, raising a torch and a spiking sword to rent the air, the mossy lagoon , the tridents clashing as sea-snakes lashing one against the other, shamrocks growing out of the rust of them both, , the swilling kelp from a leaking North Sea, cresting into the lake from all the spilling sides of the basin, all the whistling edges of the bowl, a spooning crater, an eyelets two flute-hollows, a calf's round nose.

A grazing antelope from the bank drinks from the widening dipper, from the august lagoon, from the glimmering pool. Its spotted coat shines like an oyster on a sandy beach like scallop shells on a rotting bark, like limpets on a nibbled mulberry beam, a strawberry seed, a gooseberry ream.

The shorn dress of a walking princess, a driad, a forest dweller, a shepherdess skirting on the grass, catching on the diving trellises of a brambly stream, a running brook clear reflecting her basket, tossing up sprays and trickles of wandering spittle, tossing up salmons clear, trout plunging and leaping as is their right to leap, a surging whirl of tailfins shining bright, translucent seahorses, stingrays floating clear upon the shifting and meandering sandy floor dunes, the quirky and pebbly sheen.

A star, a lark, a burning bundle of hay, a spinning dart, a coiling screw or spray of auburn hair, spinning in the glimmering sunshine.

She strode forewards, her moccasins sinking into the mud. For many moons now, she would have to walk. Ice was encrusted upon the fringes, all along the porcupine quills whorled and worsted, pierced at their centre, sewing and knitting, scarring and tattooing, a tortoise, swimming in front of a surging reflection of the sun in the milky chalice of the of the mill-weedy lake

A twisting, curling serpent, the umbrella grass of a shady hood, the turning of a veiled lizard, gripping its soles and fingers on the knotting and flaking wood. A cymbelline of trellised moths fluttering upon the fanning chill like castanets, clicking and breezing with the stern whirling, the stamping of roots and rising of branches, coiling, circling, entwining themselves round a ploughshare like a mythical serpent round a pitchfork or trident. Stamping heels, tossing skirts in a

flamenco frieze, butterflies whirling like palms unfurling casting tufts of perfume and lashings of fragrance upon the whispering silken breeze.

The arcing of a tunnel of mist, a tower of clouds, flapping flamingoes kites flying up into the battlements of war, sparrows scurrying into the casements of peace, cranes peering into the cunning woven tapestries, dancing swans flocking, flaking feathers, arching in moats, flying into rafters, roosters scurrying into rooves teeming with doves.

The faery's cavern, where their wings were painted with like butterflies, where fingers and moss hung there like sparkling diamonds of dew from their door hangings, leathern lanterns of eucalyptus oil burning with wicks of lichens, blooming flares like hibiscus alighting upon the candles wax, the lamps' grip, the altar of the flame and the flickering dragon in the shrine.

A washing iris, a rinsing train of ducks, leading their young across the frozen lake across the diamonds off ice, the sparkling needles of sunlight and shivering wind crossed and flurried with glissades of snowflakes and harsh shingles, angling askew, of sleet, garrets of hail spewing, surrounded by a moat of rain, a block of water.

A mermaid of washed-up fishnets, of pulling and tugging carbuncles, of clinging limpets and mussels, a barnacles encrusted the fore and aft of her fins. A dolphin shape emerging from the water's surface, clean and shimmering, shining as though wrapped and flapping lacewings, the track of a swimming angle fish through the swilling, swirling, milling lagoon and hamlet, the gushing torrential bay and its shining shingled sands, sweeping with the rattling pebbles in the sieve of the wind

"I am a collector of discarded stuffs," said the gypsy woman, of old peeling, of scraps and scans and guttering threadbare pans; I twist, I bind them together wend them round a lapped and looped spool, a twisting hemp chord with many bandlets branching from among its twirling wigs, curling threads and vines and prickling thorns. We were all central Asian travellers together in the land of mist, and fog, of simmering haints and bright dippers, studded with flashing diamonds, shining in the deep velvet of the evening, the black swan throat of the night.

A sprig of lilies arching up the dome-way, eating into the crust of mossy bulrush mats, clogging up the gangway or the archway, the door-flap of woven palm, Queen Anne's lace nodding in the shower of prickling sunlight freckled, dusting, crawling, raw, unripe peaches, flowering apricots, plunging oranges, ripening tangerines, ambling pistachios and leaping pecans, all growing in a reed like a grapevine, a laurel of curving chestnut leaves and circling oxbows, a hugging branch of olives and of hugging wheat sheaves.

A glancing shoreline, a glaring with mirrors and thorns, shining with bright deer spots and ram-ibex horns, shorn with the shears of a ram's golden fleece, shivering upon the wind like flying geese and a doe rushing up the towers of cloud, the mossy antlers crossed a nest for rabbits, hares and squirrels, mice and prairie voles.

The symbol of a chain of wasps and of flying fleas, a flying flock of dragonflies and of moths, a butterfly in beating wings, , a marmot feeding, a gopher rising, a weasel poling, a porcupine snivelling, a hedgehog squeezing, sponging tentacling itself through gaps in the cracked archway, unsticking itself from the lacy fern and lichened clouds in the summer's fall, the lashes that interrupt the waterfall that pierces among the high reaches of the mango grove, an red maple stalks barricading a leaning forts' thrall, sturdily leaning up into the sky like a night watcher enthralled by the clouds and the slipping rays of the sun.

Ready to burst into flames at the least of a call, the grasses wave, at the honk from a goose a soaring up the currents of wind, a tumbling of a steep brook and the diving plunging of a hummingbird, the arrow of the hawks' beak, 'rising above federline" the rusty answer of a call so sweet and ever reiterated

“I sing thee, Jiban debata. I am brave, daring and strong. My muscles, coiled like snakes, do spring to toil for thee. I run always, I swim, the scents and wills of the air guide and excite my nostrils. Thou wind, I am thy steed.

Imraan bumped into Junaid, the goat, once, twice, and embraced him as they tumbled to the ground. His hands around Junaid’s shoulders, Junaid butted him gently with the side of his jaw. He will drag you, sweet djinn, across the sands!” cired Homaira. “He will make of you a streak in the desert!”

He released the goat, and the goat shot forward like a comet, tearing a rend in the sky with his horns. “We shall fly!” railed Aishcha. Junaid scampered sideways, ears flying, daring them to keep up with him and bared his teeth. The two ran behind him and he reared, they charged and he twisted, rearing backwards over them in a coiled arc or a bridge, like a stream of tea pouring from an unfired jug, smelling strong sweet and heated like the marsh from whence it was raised, patted and shaped into curving, graceful vessel by nimble fingers.

Ten yards off Imraan caught Aishca by the waist and flipped her over, her hair flying. So she was a star, a flower, a gull borne upon the wind. Let me go, Imraan!” she cried, and her arms seized centrifuge and she launched herself from his arms upon the flying air like a gymnast twirling from a trapeze, or a little fiend whirling around a bonfire on a cooking spoon.

Rahim Khan had not shod them with anklets or with rings, such being beyond the purchase of dust and stone and ground flour that settled on their faces and fingers in the eternity of leaping between one repast and the next.

The sides of the pot Homaira was using was red or rusty with the stains of red bean foam thick, sweet, viscous, running down the sides. It was alumninium, and it gleamed ever new in the slanting light from the window portal/opening sky blue, deep, grey violet, off-white lemon/golden fleece yellow, its curved rim, bending and cracked with the molten heat of boiling;

A little girl, jumping, tumbling, chasing like an eddy of wind, casting a spray of fallen leaves

A boy leading the young sheep with his rod barred across his shoulders and his breast heaving

Homaira bumped each of their heads and they were off, running, mingling among the seeds and the bursting, crying grasses and curling, bubbling, thirsting streams.

She a sunlit haired, corn-shuck sheaved, golden rope-ladder braided lass, with thatching waving hair, scrubbing, scrumming, streaming strawberry strewn, corkscrewing, spooling, drifting mewling like a milksop kitten, A shooting ginger weasel, striped and ribald, honey and cinnamon, rosemary and sage-sprouts freshened with time. Crests of chestnut

Swilling, drawing, shimmering, looping, cresting, ensconcing, warmth, waving, enfolding, slithering, shooing, ushering, swirling, falcon-ing, gloaming, spiralling locks shining as the risen full moon, the ripples of chestnut and of waterfalls of hail, the amber lamp like the gleam of fireflies around a fen, or the looping leaping of the flares of light from a singeing shrub torch or obscure kerosene lantern.

The swiftly glancing fields and slopes of Turin, swathing and enveloping the mist, its tendrils and curliques the umbilical chord of a sweeping, glimmering spirit, the sparkling snows of a leaning elm, the toes and upturned heels of rocks, knees of knobs and maple cheeks of elfin lads, who come to help her with mending the nets or boats.

She followed the path of the Kurds, the muddy sand-line-creases of their cheeks, the leathery tight weather-eaten eyelids of crinkled faery tern feet,

You twirl and twist and swirl and spin, shunting and sparring, soaring; a black-bear in the briars, his fur smeared with blackberries and raspberry thorns, litters of lichens and spurs of river-grass, bulrushes.

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The silver bells and holly are tinkling and rustling. Evergreens are sparkling with snow. A hardened rock of ice on which a reindeer stands, pawing the ground with his hooves. His antlers are growing, and shedding a lichen like velvet. His nose is shining red, glowing like lava. He is the one whom others teased for his shiny nose; but now Santa has chosen him to lead the sleigh fleet, for that very reason.

My friend Vasudeva. He came prepared for his assignment with the faith that using his traditional knowledge of mystical apprehension of things and their symbols, words referring to products such as rock salt (jal-jeera), cotton clothes and other ethnically produced artifacts; was enough to carry through with the assignment; and he is so pure, clear and precise about how he talks about the artifacts, you can imagine them entirely with clarity when he gives his presentation.

But the professor doesn't accept this. She says he is not analytical enough, that his presentation doesn't move anywhere. Just like she commented on another presentation, which she said was static. My, she sure has high standards. At the same time, she doesn't know how to appreciate things for what they are.

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I speak in low tones and you know the reason/Our Alaq must not be known,/They want to take away his power/And bleach his bones./Think of something happy/Think of something nice/ When the army forces come/Make sure you give them 'rice'.

When the Andean flute pays, it will affect you and you won't quite know why. Just make sure no one ignorant breaks the spell.

Long feathered brown speckled pheasants, stripe tailed condors swinging

Winging on a flighty slipstream

Above Machu Pichu, flying in circles

Dovetailing and swooping, like an arrow,

A spear or a meteor dive into the swooping air

Why it makes such a spectacle, such a swooping swinging in my solar plexus,

Like a stone falling into an urn of water

To heighten the water level and make it drinkable

By a short crow's beak, is a mystery

But, we think, that every creature is enervated by a soul,

And every soul is interconnected and interpenetrating

And that is why one being can feel what another feels.

***

Hiawatha on the river,/Tied his hair with eagle feathers/Fluttering and a-quiver/His veins a throbbing like a zither/Minehaha rides behind him,/ like unto a reindeer running/The sleigh driver in the diadem/Of Orion's belt and sword/

Let us travel across the land/of cane -bush, bulrush and grassy desert/Of the dune grass and the rushes/Whispering near the rivers' edges/The deer the doe, the caribou/Graze in herds of hoof and snowshoe/Flowers that bloom on the cold desert tundra/And mosses and lichens on forests in taiga.

They disembark and carry the canoe/On their shoulders and their shoes/the moccasins of leather/And their shawls of woven blanket of lama wool/Traded from silver and turquoise in Utacan, Mexico,/They walked among the grassy meadows, filled with butter cups and larkins, Bluebells and the honey suckle, raspberry, blueberry and huckleberry.

Till they came to a mountain steep/A valley deep covered with lavender flowers/That looked like a stream reflecting the blue-sky welkin. Their arms reflected all the water, shining in spokes and flashes of the ripples; flying ducks and falling feathers, erupting in the changing wind.

Off they trampled on mosses together of the cedar and the sequoia, red woods, making signs unto the animals of where they'd come from, images of places past, so they knew how to guide them, where they'd come from, where they'd go.

"His moccasins were yellow beaded/Porcupine quilled, I mean and fringed/His scalp-lock was feather tangled/His calico shirt was block printed. "You're winded but keep going after a bit of rest. Don't let the pain rankle. Go for a walk and follow where the eagle leads you and look around you and register all the miracles of nature, and you will live another day."

***

The condor of the Andes woke up, with the sun, and stretched his wings and extended his long, buttermilk-coloured feathers. The sunlight streamed over them, bathing their fluted fibres in a golden swathe, like a divine water washing; an aura of tinkling, sparkling metallic hue, like young women walking to collect water from nearby streams bathe their supple, bony and flexible feet under the gushing, transparent rivulet that sighs, swishes and chatters down the rocky slopes of the mountainside and the stony channel of the carved waterfall. At the valley of the mountain, below the ruins of Machu Pichu, the emerald and jade green rainforest began, packed with juniper, sassafras, banana, red wood, sal and acacia, their branches welkin wards and tangling, catching in each-other like a knotted up hammock splayed out between trees and woven from strands of cotton or alpaca wool.

The snaking river, tinkling and rushing in the hills, green, serpentine cloudy, flat and green in the valley, carving many canyons which were reflected in its slurried, algaed, sluggish water.

Yolanda painted an eagle on her wooden, carved door, coloured with red earth and limestone for the feathers and powdered obsidian for its glittering eyes.

"We won't accept the stamp of primitivism," Searhe objected. "Our oratory skills, our verbal wars, our verses sparring, they are all better than your gun warfare and treacherous swordsmanship. We trust in the power of the spirits of the smoke, the wind and the rippling, waving water, to get us out of a time when we are being extracted like silver ore from the rocks, but like gold dust and liannas clinging to the bark of the coniferous we will cling to our land, our cries like young children at mother earth's bosom."

***

The blue sky is an ocean that ripples with sound. A cave, a wagon roof of canvas, a mausoleum dome; a mosque, topped with moon and stars. It washes you in sunlight. It dapples you in rain. It shades you with clouds. It blindfolds you in blue satin, robin's egg goggles, powder of milk, that the

Mongols dried out of the drink that comes from mare's milk. The sky is what it is, and as Chen says, to live is to shout at the sky.

The fountain sprays of coconut tree leaves, like flicks of a woman's straight haired ponytail, long, pollen dusted fringes hanging from the gulmohur tree; a water pot, set down on the cement tank infront of them; downy pigeon feathers clustered and fluttering on the cement window frame.

Chinese lanterns with their feathers a whispering hanging from the electric wire strung across the park, dotted with Diwali lights. Dried ivy vines grown and wrapping themselves around the barbed wire fence. I say, they say, he says, she says. Oh, poets, be not ashamed when you work with your hands for food, after all, it is life experience that teaches for creativity. Pine cones seeded with light seeds, sprouting in the ground into plants like leeks, mung-beans and saplings like evergreens rolling to and fro like porcupines.

The fenlands used to grow turnips, potatoes, and sugar beets, drained to grow oats, barley and wheat, and to graze cattle and sheep. Tallow and whale fat candles and lamps, burning, spitting fiercely in the night on the kitchen table like a bonfire, hot points of light, warm flame, illuminating, kindling the darkness.

The herbs hung from the window, dry and curl into golden corn-colour from green freshness and smell inviting, fragrant. Many lilies smelling heavenly in the garden, just outside. Spun out of white cloud, honey and bees' wax, filled with nectar and royal jelly.

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2. Healing will come, healing will come. Align yourself with your passion and faith, the intanglio of your fire of blood, the suffering of Christ, which was turned into a great victory.

Dragonflies are wrought of gold, gauze and rotting eaves. Tiny helicopters of the lake marsh, buzzing, darting, careening. They come to sniff my earlobes and mill around my wrists, like bracelets, sweet nosing insects, who have nothing to do with jewellers and are simply curious and explorative. I speak to them saying, are the jade, springing grasshoppers your cousins? How do you fly with so many flaps of your wings per second? How do you teach your children to fly, or is it just instinct? O, insects, you have engraved yourselves upon my heart, my breath tells the sweetness of the Lord's flying creatures. May you live long and pollinate many flowers! I see you darting around the shed like fireflies buzzing.

Light upon light, light into light, from the darkness. Windows of sight. Know that your eyes are powerful, and so is the mind and heart.

Trailblaze your own path of goodness, of vision, of justice, of light. Like Indian braves walking down a forest path, taking in everything they see and responding to everything in loyalty, good feeling and the outpouring of life. Use as little electricity as you can, and stand in solidarity with those who mine coal and petroleum, who get black lung disease, pneumonicosis and who stand in danger of being burned or blown up by the explosives they are told to detonate to unearth what their companies want to mine.

See the construction of this sentence comes, not from a book, but from reasoning with the heart.

Your soul has been whittled and hewn down to a sparkling diamond, by the eroding waters of humility, but unlike a diamond, your soul is fluid, a river, a waterfall of consciousness, through which sturgeons swim, the thoughts and shadows of feelings, but the radiant sunshine of enlightenment pierces through the limpid river most powerfully, illuminating its depth, just as arrows pierce deer-flesh, or sunlight evaporates water, a bubbling up, a scouring of the floor with soapy suds, rising to form rainclouds and fall in raining torrents.

I know the chlorophyll stench of drying moss on the wall, thirsting and parched for precipitation. I know the mad wriggling of the earthworm which writhes and wriggles for want of moisture, in the gravelly soil. Why did it get there? What did it seek in a place it could not even burrow? That is not for me to contemplate. For me is only the imperative to move the poor creature to wetter soil.

***

His cross is every tree. A cross, hewn of wood, with branches and bark. His strong heart stirs the beating sea. I see his blood upon the rose, his tears in the rain from the skies, his linen light upon the eternal snows, his beard in flocks of sparrows before my eyes.

His chest is the framework of hewn lumber

Heaving with his winning of the winner's race

His brow and eyelids defeat the eternal slumber

Of the soul and the extraction of labour from others' pace.

The adoration in the devotee's face

Speaks of an unconscious notion of indebtedness,

And that they will keep bringing flowers

To bloom and wilt at this alar of blessedness

Thus say the lips of the devotees of Ram and Jesus Christ

Writing up a history of the deeds that do their deeds together splice

This the girl recited as she did up her hair and painted kohl around her eyes, thinking, it is not enough in this life merely to think of attractiveness; one must develop one's spiritual side too, or else one feels empty, incomplete, unfulfilled. And the intellectual side and physical strength and duty are also important. You are very sensitive. Therefore, approach things with care and caution. Wedges of wood, bricks and clay, rooves of iron, rusting in the moist air and rain drizzling. Take your salvation by the hands and move forwards. Amen.

***

"Stories are written disguised as entertainment. Stories can change the heart; the single thought of a story can change one's life."

'Thoufa" means hair in Chinese. I look for hair being whipped behind her like a waterfall, in the stark, rushing wind as fast and thunderous as a rushing horse, a galloping steed with its mane spread out on the wind. She whips my hair back. The wind combs through her like a comb; like a cleansing wave, sinking down in the channels of rock, gravel, sands and pebbles in a limpid stream.

She runs with the typhoon, her bare steps light upon the gravelly ground as her heart thuds with the pulse of the tribal fear, the fear of loneliness, of totemic desecration. She had to rescue the tortoise from becoming meat in a butcher's shop of the colonialists.

"We do not eat turtles," she sobbed, hugging herself as she reached them. "See this tattoo on my wrist?" She bared her forearm at them. "It's a tortoise. Give us our totem back. Its shell is the canopy of the forest. Its flesh is the branches that hold up the leaves. Give me back my friend and my cousin," she sobbed.

The daughter of the butcher shop owner came out through the door and examined the tortoise in its basket, reached out her arms and tried to hand it to her. "Not so fast," the shop assistant said. The

shop owner's daughter cried out, "She's my friend, and she's upset about the fact that we're using an animal that her tribe claims is their totem! Do you really think people can be kept in peace if we enrage their religious sentiments so blatantly?"

The shop assistant paused. "Let's ask your father," he said. "Fine," seethed the butcher's daughter at him. "Insubordination." She looked at her friend Autumn, who was still crying but watching the scene. "Don't mind him, he really doesn't know how to keep shop or anything. Or he's totally dogmatic about it, I guess I should say."

***

6. Not for here.)

Bless those trees that made this paper with their pulp. Bless the meches that moulded it, and the hands that arranged it. Bless those who transported and sold it. And I shall use this tongue as a way to rebuild the lowly, cutting down the haughty and relegating them to equality with others.

The duck-pond, fish-pond coated with algae and lily pads, set like an emerald pool in the hill of Rhodes North, covered with bare brown knolls and dried grass, yellow in the arid winter breeze, through which clumps of snow and pretty silver-wrought snowflakes were falling.

The windows of my dorm rooms are grilled with wrought iron, wire meches and glass. The sun streams out from beyond in the great outdoors, within which I will tramp and trudge wrapped in coat, mittens and scarf, and watch as the geese and ducks roost and flutter, foraging for seeds and worms on the grassy covered hills.

Once, in a fit of madness, I put all my dupattas and woollens out there for them to nestle in. I am done looking at religious pictures to make my decisions. But those birds didn't need the clothes, of course. I thought I could save them from the cold but they were okay as they were already.

Oil coated feathers, elegantine, eiderdown, lining a nest of twigs and grass, making it warm for the chicks. They hatched from two oval shaped solid golden eggs. And the shell is still in the nest; and some of the yolk too. In fact, the chicks' feathers are covered and coated with the liquid yellow yolk. They are adorable, their little beady brown eyes peering curiously out of their fuzzy, gosling heads.

***

Awe. A rippling Tulsi plant, its green, yellow and red leaves picked out in the silvery dew, shaking in the morning mistrals, hung with a dreamcatcher like spider web of gossamer thread.

I saw a speck of starlight glittering in the air./I saw a footprint in the grass of a lightning mare./If you were generous, the skyward/Would of you have spoken boldly/To be sent heavenward/When you came to the end of your journey.

Minehaha, laughing water/The Dakota chieftain's daughter/Carved of birchbark, arms and face/With reddish brown and rusty grace/Beautiful with the wind in her long hair.

Peering from my iron grilled window/Lined with almond and with linden/Growing out within the garden,/Sending forth its mossy branches/Ivy clad and smouldering emerald./

I see a building peach painted/Brick built, with windows like Ajanta caves/Monasteries hewn of rock/In which Buddha's teachings took root/Spread in spending luminous paintings/Of the gift of the begging bowl to his son;/Of the tree of enlightenment and the defeat of Mara/Of the four visions that caused him anguish.

A salwar and its kameez hanging/Like an embossed, embroidered carpet/Coloured beige, green, red and blue/Hanging from the grilled window.

***

Blue ribboned hair and baked oatmeal cookies; jays roosting in trees and wearing blue acid washed jeans. Hillary wears a combination of the cowboy and the girly, 'honing' her feminine side even as she takes a man's job as a car mechanic. She pumped wind into a customer's flooding tyre after they had replaced the punctured one.

She says: the brush of the eternal way/Paints the clouds in swirls upon the sky; the face of the earth laughs in the colours with which it is steeped. She wears a girdle of green and veils of lily flowers with footprints of bees and ants traced, freckled, her feet are painted by the red alta marks which show the colour of her supple skin.

The raggedy edges of leaves, like the spongy tissues of a lung, a gosling feather, a tattered dupatta or veil. Let us know what the oppressed under ISIS think. At the same time, let us not decry movements against capitalism, even if they are branded as fanatic.

Almonds, walnuts and pistachios, folded up in a piece of paper, wrapped up with a white ribbon, or a rubber band, or a piece of creeper twine. The shadows sinking and seeping through the trees like ink, bathing them in a photographic light of camouflage of leopards of dappled green and white, dark and bright, rust coloured earth and rock salt.

His eyes focus on the acacia tree, its seedpods like swords of the martial arts masters, scabbarded at the hip. It rises, like a green fountain, spilling, pouring out green, mossy water like the murky pool of a rippling, hyacinth coloured lake.

The Apsara, an Astamatrika, with branching conduits of energy, energy channels, nerves, nadis, conglomerates of the solar plexus and gut; a beautiful mountain from which emanates ki, life force, in the channels of energy of the universe, Qigong. The Apsara *was* the mountain on which many medicinal herbs grew, smelling fresh, bitter and sour, searing the respiratory system on exhalation and the digestive system on ingestion. In the same way, the sun seared the paddy fields and scorched them dry, so that all the soupy water was sucked up by the rootlets like a hungry person slurping up his or her noodles from a tin plate in a jail room.

And the legacy of that scorching sun was that all the germs on that laundry set out in the buffeting wind, too, dried, and things were clean and ready to be worn again.

A slab of trees, a trellis of bamboo, with a few ratoons dried, sparks of brownish stems and leaves. Find the story in the heart of man's interaction with nature. A greenhouse made of iron framework staked into the ground covered with green canvas. In other places, covering parts of the rooves of houses, neath the tin corrugated rooves. A rhythm of growth, brush, swaying, interlocking meches of virulent plants, saying hello to all that look on them.

A fish with soft, silvery scales swimming and carving gracefully through the lee at night. It sinuously weaves through the mangrove roots, stems and pneumatophores. The people taking walks gaze at others briefly as they walk through veils of remembrance of the days' happenings. Some young girl's father has forbidden her to study the arts, another's parents have rejected her choice of a marriage partner; still another has found new friends.

Fire, ice, lava and water. Earth and roses, all glowing like dawn or dusk upon one's cheeks, stained red with the intoxication of kind, silly jokes and laughter. A veil of sky blue, wrapped like a shawl. An awl, a charpoy, a door, a shack. Set upon the crossroads, the highway of Montgomerry Avenue, Mount Everest, Matruchhaya, Monsieur Leblanc's bakery, Elm trees bowing and bending, banyan tree roots tangling, their branches lifting squirrel-sky-scrapers and sparrow-nests and crushed, ripening figs on the air painted and swished, smoothened and stirred by parakeets' flight. It is night. I must work to find the day of Christ.

A plum cheeked, wrinkle nosed woman, with a silver sickle drawn through her nostril like a pin, clothed in yellow cotton and carrying a scythe.

Try to understand the pain of a person discriminated against because of the colour of their skin, their whole family exploited by others coming from the outside, and then try and dismantle these institutions, norms and thought patterns that enable such a system. This day is not yet past. I am happy today because I have been friendly and helpful. But I could do more. The bitter sour tang of tulsi leaves, seeds and stem-branches, chewed up in the mouth, stewed in a concoction of red-green water, drunk to cure a cough.

The tribals, who originated the God Shiva, talk of swards of grass rippling underneath the changeful raincloud mist dispelling wind. They talk of destructive floods, bringing fertility to the dry, cracked and rocky barren fields.

Aimlessness is not a good thing in youth. Let's see how things they like doing and are talented at can be turned into a profession. The rustling of the evergreens in the showy mistrals blowing from behind the mountains bringing sleet, the whispering of old mantras and prayers in the hanging bark, branches and twigs. Talismans of dried pink and orange thread, for Bhaiduj, flying hither and thither when they are caught on a hammered nail, on the green-wood fence.

The Mundas are in the rice fields, the woman is ankle deep in slurry-ed water, muddy with the soil, transplanting rice saplings. It is hard, back-bending, gruelling work. The saplings are delicate, sending the shoots jade green up into the moist wind where they are flattened out and the tunes sung in their leaves.

Emblems and mascots, carved into the wrought iron bells that ring in the windy temple, built of corrugated iron, cement beams and brick, mortar and plaster. A swan, a phoenix, an eagle and a cuckoo. Their wings are outstretched to graze each-others' feathers, forming a guild of four.

***

A salesgirl in Bombay, Sania span together the egg yolk from one egg with chillis, an onion and a tiny bit of oil to make an omelette with which to feed her family, along with one chapatti each.

She wanted to fill their bellies, so she picked some lichis and mushrooms from the garden and added them (2 each to their plates) She saved the skin, which looked like raspberry outer casings, rough and pitted, red and brown and rough to the touch. The mushrooms she chopped into four pieces each and stir-fried them in an aluminium wok, with oil and potatoes.

She would always cherish her family, and would remember them even as she went for her job, which she went to both fulfil her-self and feed herself and them.

She stepped onto the train, her back bent with a sack-load of amlas and limbo (lemons). "Amla le, limboo leiiia!"

And a few housewives who were also working women, came fore-wards to purchase the little tufts and bouquets of five amlas each to five limboos (or lemons) both soury and sparky fruits that would tang up one's cooking.

She saw the younger generation of travellers, whose age often coincided with her own, and how some of them had headphones in their ears so they could privately listen to music, or were staring at videos on their phones. She didn't approve. For what became of the wondrous world around them, that of splashing rain making puddles round the bowing green leafy trees around them, in which they would jump and drench one another with water, or even sit in like pigs having mud-baths, whose branches gestured skill-fully, gracefully, eerily, like dancers in the wind? Or the houses

stacked one on top of each-other on the margins of the railway tracks, covered with blue plastic sheets, or iron shingle, and painted with chipping blue or light mint green paint, imagining what sort of things their inhabitants did, and how they managed with what little they had, just like she did?

Weave together posies and roses,

String together cowries and turquoises

Hold the ocean in the cup of your palm,

And the sand in the lines of your hand

And the foam upon your tongue,

To spray your cheeks full broad and slathered.

The scallop shells and mussel grooves

Flash iridescent in the searing dawning light

The seaweed flutters, salted like mermaid's hair,

And waving serene crops of the ocean's bed.

Always, sand castles, shingle and battlements, towers rising

In beaches when romped by children,

And moats and highways, roads and houses,

Littered, studded with pools of water, supported by sticks fallen from trees in a storm.

***

The sky was bluer than the sapphires reflected in the two buckets she had slung across her shoulders, bluer than the scrubbed cement and earth-moss shaded bricks that paved the grapevine arbour pathway down which her sister's brown, weathered, silver-ring toed feet walked; bluer than her sister's turquoise bracelet, it was a bright, powdery, sparkly blue that only the sky could ever be; the sky brightened by her prayers, painted by her misery, energised by her fasting, and given wash power like rin, by her mutterings of the holy rosary.

Mango tree leaves; resplendent with early dew and rain, rising in an atmosphere of sunlight and humidity, branches bowing with the weight of half ripe, round, reddish, blushing mangoes, barren branches rising like twisting lightning or the stature of the curving body and tail of red vented bulbuls perching on the woody branch.

Ashoka trees, lumbering and sloping in the distance, lapping up the atmosphere with their curving, sickle leaves, which range from light, mint green, to dark, forest, to papery, manila brown.

Behind, a house, whose roof is a plastic sheet of sea-green. Purple and grey turtle doves roost and nestle in the barren branches of a gewa tree, which has lost its leaves to the Indian spring, all under the pall of a grey sky that has brought curtains of rain, but now is withholding its torrents, and sending instead beautiful fresh gusts of air like waves of an ocean, tumbling over each-other. Or the boards of walls made of tin, corrugated iron or sandpaper, saw-dust planks, wood, crash down upon each-other like sheets of paper collapsing.

Sheila knew that when people were travelling, they were often subject to undue and untold hardships, among them eating only once or twice a day, walking for hours without rest, or walking

without more than one drink of water in the hot sun for a full day, sometimes shoeless as one's sandals broke on the journeying.

Thus Sheila and Yasinia brought out urn jars of water to slake the thirst of the travellers who were setting up camp.

Sheila had a memory of when she was just a little girl; knitting scarves of wool and weather; sewing coats of dun and leather, an ornate diamond argyle pattern, challenging to knit, for poor folks unsheltered in winter.

Now, skirts mended with needle and thread, bedding threaded with green and red, quilts stuffed with cotton southern grown, saddles stitched with needles of bone.

Sheila cobbled together a patchwork of pine, strawberry and hay-coloured squares, cut from her dagri, a bedsheet and torn beige curtains.

Soon after, the two sisters took them to the mountain pass, to wait underneath a bivouac constructed of fallen cypress boughs and whorled grass thatching, for less well-off folk, ones who truly struggled and yet never had enough, to come by and take them for protection against the cold.

Although poor, Sheila and Yasinia were better off than the landless, those who worked on others' land, or merely grazed others' goats and sheep, those who travelled from season to season in tents, searching for work on other people's farms, the sharecroppers, or those who shivered on by-lanes and mountain passes, begging for a living, walking barefoot in ragged sandals.

They worked their own small plot of land, cultivating wheat with a few apple and pear trees on the margins of their farm. They were not blood sisters, but foundlings, and neither, by birth, of Nuristan. Yasinia was a Tajik, and Sheila an Uzbek, but one was half Brahui and the other half Gujjar from the matrilineal lines. The elder was raised by a Nuristani nurse maid on a landlord's farm, whose servants had discovered the babies at their doorstep at the respective times. And Yasinia, being older than Sheila by about seven years, had soon become her guardian. She had had to oversee her upbringing and schooling as a girl who could survive among the ravages of the elements, and the scarce solitude of wind through the whingeing wheat fields and the rain whipping through the air and the spades through the soil, and the stoicism of livestock and the love of improvised kin knitted together like caps warming a baby's head. She had had to teach both Aref and Sheila their letters when they were still crawling around the wood, mud and straw floor or bouncing on her knees. Among Yasinia and Sheila's kind, there were dun leathern skins and pecan and slate as well. Broken teeth and crow's feet had dark Yasinia, as well as had dusky Sheila, scarecrow hair in knots and burrs like a Tibetan yak, and once even a clean picked scalp.

When Sheila had been a year old, crawling on the floor of the barn while Yasinia milked the livestock, Sheila observed the sow bugs on the ground, reaching out to touch them but noticed they always curled themselves up into little balls and tried to scooch away from her.

"Don't harass any creature, be it even a cockroach, if you find it on the face of this earth," Yasinia had told her, and wrapped a skein of wool for her younger sister, her charge, to play with unspooling.

"I would not be one of them, roaming without a home, and without lunch however small, on the highways and the hillrails, no I would not, though I know god rests in them," said Sheila, speaking of the landless. "But since we are the stronger on earthly terms, it is our duty to provide for the weaker, and to protect them from withering away into the elements."

"I could happily go on for years without lunch," said Yasinia. "As I'm the one preparing it.

"Don't you know I help you almost every morning before I go to pasture?" asked Sheila.

"Of course, said Yasinia. "When your help I can certainly bear it." Chided herself for that departure from memory and thankfulness.

Be your own Zalim, torturer, said Sheila with a touch of laughter amidst her sudden kindness.

"You really do help," said Yasinia, "The household could simply not be run without you. Ask Aref, who does the weaving, what he thinks about your contribution."

"Well, I wouldn't have any wool to weave if you didn't take the goats and sheep out to pasture, and we wouldn't have no heavenly nourishing milk to drink. So I think you are looking at a pretty unequivocal opinion," said Aref with a flourish.

Sheila hugged her brother around the shoulders from behind. She felt warmer and happier. "I will try to be true to your praise," she said timidly. "And to strive always to be of aid, to confer with honesty and to apply advice where it is directed."

"The girl is learning well, I swear it," said Yasinia, pinching her throat and continued to churn the butter with poise, strength and a studied grace. "Hey, Sheila, want to take a turn?"

She then said, "O sister, what are the five rules to keeping one's family intact?"

Sheila replied shamefacedly: "By giving food to one's relatives after they come home from work or school, by listening to what they have to say about their day and offering them wisdom in how to handle their realities. This is complicate though. What if the hardships people have to suffer are beyond what any human should have to suffer, because of the inhumanity and cruelty of other people, blinded by hatred and self-interest, stilted by ideology and trying to protect their own privileges? Witness how Muslims everywhere are being targeted and terrorized, and they're trying to defend themselves and are being called terrorists. You" she told the imaginary journalist, "Actually say more things about your privileged position as a writer and unwillingness to engage with their issues when you paint their life as too idyllic. But yet! The laws that others, the Russians, the Americans, the British use to govern, may we ever be sovereign from them, differ! Unstoppability of purpose and unwavering determination is what they carry within them, for otherwise they could never be salvaged, a secular politics, but we seek the way of religion in all things. Seek the will of the Lord in all our decisions and thus derive our tracing of multiple possible paths. What else? By giving aid in terms of money or labour to one's mother and father, or whomever one lives with, when required. By praying for the fates of all to be sunny and conducive to happiness and thriving, and that their livelihoods be secured. And praying that they continue to grow in the narrow paths of believers.

And if someone oppresses one, by speaking to them of the wrongfulness of their conduct and by explaining to them how one would rather be treated by them, and if yet they do not relent, by fleeing and praying for them when one is safely away.

By always being skilful in one's work, and following one's talents, and expanding one's capabilities, and practicing the verses of the Quran on paper or sand, and raising one's own couplets to the wind."

***

A female Buddhist monk in a maroon robe, shaven headed,

Walking in meditation, slowly, rhythmically

Spinning a skein of wool between her fingers as she walks.

And turning a prayer wheel of darkened wood, with engraved characters.

Exuding love for all creatures, but without attachment, only a consciousness of interdependence and individual duty.

Christ says, with me as your focus, you need not get rid of love.

Your duties and your calling are both enjoyable to you

And all your difficulties a cross you are bearing

To be worthy of me. Nails, tortures, torments, persecutions, they will

Mortify your flesh to make your spirit stronger,

For when I am weak, then, O God, you make me then most strong

Let people enjoy the beautiful gardens around;

Be enraptured by the delight of creation
Flowers, trees, wind and sunshine.

Squirrels, rats, sparrows, pigeons and crows, and speak to them of my mercy and compassion.

Overflowing like a waterfall from a hilltop does cross over a bed of stones

Fresh, cool, all embracing and fluid; nourishing and refreshing all it comes into contact with

Readying those it touches for work and making something of use or beauty in this world or the next.

Like the breath which brushes a pan-pipe,

Making melodious whistling sound, in such a way, let the breath of God touch the soul harp

To make the spirit sing.

I search among the realms of light, of words and sound, of colour and rhythm. I find that you, o boys of the watchman profession, are made of rain and sun, sand and wood and wind. Once there was a shack, made of partly rotten, pitted wood and some greenwood, planed and fitted together with nails and in places tied together with jute ropes and cotton twine. It was very delicate. Any windstorm could come and flatted it with a strong gust, and even a passing minstrel with his song.

So, the house made a covenant with the air, that instead of working against its fittings with strength, it would work more weakly with moisture, rotting the wood slowly with the moisture it carried from the sea wind. This way, it would stay standing longer, but anyway, in the end would inevitably collapse because of the limited capacity of the wood to withstand water.

This my dear, is a parable for life. Sometimes we avoid the big major sins, but keep perpetuating the sins of callousness, ignorance and indifference to what is going on around us, and gluttony. In order to reach eternal life we need to root out these subtler sins out too, or we are destroyed. And we must never look too much for security, too much for stability, but must learn to innovate and improvise in the moment.

Beneath this house is a banyan tree sapling. It sends forth shoots on the right and the left: delicate, strong green shoots. A tree that is a grass, a runner, a stolon, all rolled into the same type and giving shelter in its exquisitely leaved branches, in which may roost crows, sparrows, pigeons, bulbuls and parrots; cawing and cheeping, guttering and squawking, clamouring and fluttering.

A blue veiled maiden, who is crowned with the twelve stars of the sky and clothed with the sun. She says, work with what you are given.

The bee is your friend. The bee is sweet and yellow breasted, clear winged, and black headed. He is a very sweet fellow. He scampers and flies among the scented clover, and gathers pollen for his home in the hive to feed the larvae of the queen bee and his brother. I wonder where they live? And why did he fly so high up to my room to get trapped on my mosquito net and doe the next day? Why, oh,

why, my bee? I suppose you were curious about what was there at such a height. I hope you are flying about, buzzing and collecting pollen in some beautiful realm of sunlight, green grass and fragrance of flowers, near to God himself. Someday, Godwilling, I will meet you there, I hope. But not too soon.

The wordless, the infinite, stretches out in experience, with never-ending joy and companionship.

It is strong, stronger than it ever was. Trust I seek, and I find in you. Every day for us something new.

Open mind for a different view. And nothing else matters.

Everywhere he looked was like floating embers in a galaxy. The blue dome of the sky patched with scudding clouds, like a fluffy frays of a chewed-up shirt in the mouth, the roughness of sand rubbing like sand searing the skin. He is fierce and sharp like a sickle moon in winter.

As he dipped his pitcher, there came a terrible muse out of the water, who began to recite, the axe of her cheek glittering with dew, her dust brown arms bony as leather stretched round five-pointed starfish bones, innervated and drained by veins like rushing rivers, like surging streams of porphyry, and she began to sing. Her hair was like a fraying rope of banyan or jute russet, hanging in kinky waves, glinted chestnut, jay blue, indigo, blowing upon her lips and lake eyes sprinkled with silver-lyre, tough-sage and rose flashing, searing sun, burning to cinders, and a cavern in the ground echoed as she struck, her neck arched and swayed like a swan's, her ankles rolling, flare from her girdle jewel wafting a million veils, swirling and quenching, milling and chattering, tapping and slapping and slithering.

Her hair billowed round her like foaming crests, simmering and swaying, rising and falling round a treacherous marker, her body stole forwards like a balsam boat, bending and drawing back for every surge that it advanced.

I keep thee company, scouring and straightening, yelling and gurgling, all through the jewel of the day, the needle thin, feather slender channels of your breath holes, and the valves of your heart, and you offer me no recompense? Greet me, for I am your spraying dolphins, gloaming shapes tossing in the staid milk, silken oozing from the sky, to your home! When I speak to you, turn your faces up to me, stream me down your cheeks, knowing that she that keeps her window open, must needs be free, what goes in must come out, be released, the slant of light across your eyes, illuminating the shelves, poles and slopes in grace, shingles, cymbals and poles, ceilings and funnels, shining wrenches and clinging wedges therein, the cascade's grace streams.

Let me ferry thee, let me set thee adrift, dislodge thy ghoul, send thy spirits flying free abroad

From her fingers like trellised jewels, the touch of pungent and white apples, crimson hued tinged with coriander, her arms rippling like curious serpents, her waist twisting like a budding stream, she cast him a net she had woven from water droplets and piercing rainbows which caught him on the side of his face and shoulders as he sat brooding like an egret perched and leaning over the pool with curious speed, yet it lay its sharp, witty threads upon his flesh, it wedged his youth and put it into boiling rivulets, his skin thinned, withered, clinging to the bone. It was as though it had been flayed, moss in between bone and sinew, healing now, and airing.

The net flew and arched and sped like a garment, a sail billowing on the winds of Noah's flood, tendrils curling, wrapping, flying.

Yes, as he sat brooding like a moss-covered stone, he decrepitates, ages, goes forth a prophet, a wise man.

The skin shrivels to his bones, becoming wizened he slips from the net in a mist, alights on the sheep in the field, their shag and ram-horns, their ewes and bright-eyed lambs, he smells their fleece and searing sun's rays of their fire.

He whispers dreams into their ears, is the moisture in their breath, is evaporated by the heat emanating from their gleaming tresses

Something in between a beautiful bonfire burning gold and the searing siren of music untold

He walked then in the groves of the burning Northern Lights, Aurora Borealis during the daylight hours, the rough russet buzz cut of stalks, the tangle of lanky, light green, [each petal shrubs, sweet evergreen

The trees, the sky, the road, clear and open, the red houses he approached like a wavering mirror in a river. He walked on like tent poles unfolding, an apple blossom blooming. The distance pierced him, held him like a seaweed coursing, drying, salty in the cold streaming wind, pass, blowing on the white capped, foamy waves. The sun rose above them, sending splinters, spears and arrows of light through the half glass of ocean, bubbling, streaming, coursing, the arched waves like a cathedral's windows, pierced his irises like root tipped lances piercing the soul.

But it is always water that heals.

***

Quartz, glittering in the sand,

Sea shells, oysters, clams and mussels,

Shining with opulent brightness

Sparking and showing sheens of deep green, violet and azure blue

In the beach, brown and beige

Slipping sand levelling and falling

With the tide-line and the weight of the water

To tie with a sail-string the tide-line, the watermark

The point beyond which the marram

Grasses colonise and the jelly-fish and crabs lurk

Waiting to pinch the foot of anyone

Who comes into the vicinity.

The oceans' jade water laps over it

To wet it and hug it, embracing it with evaporating foam.

A peasant girl, sweeping the veranda of bean-clippings and hair, dust-bunnies and soot from the cooking. She tells Keshar Lal, "No, you will NOT go raid Ashraf-Ud -Daula's cantonment. Do you know how many troops he has? No, you don't. So don't bother to risk it!"

"Strategize always, and before you strategize, you need information about the setup. Without this information, the strategy has no teeth, but is a phantom in the air, of not much consequence.

We know that Ashraf-Ud-Daula's army is financed by the taxes levied on a certain population of 10,000 peasants of his area. We also know how much he spends on public works and public

buildings. Subtract that entire amount from the entire revenue and you get what he spends on his army. Do you know how much he spends to remunerate each one of his army members? Divide army expenditure by that amount, and you'll obtain the population size of his entire army!"

Harpreet didn't quite have a reply to all of that.

As Harpreet was walking to market, she noticed another market woman, selling turquoise bracelets, pearl and opal charms and amulets. The girl was wearing a headscarf, a sky blue burqa that covered her brown hair and was tied under her chin. Harpreet was intrigued, by her sale as by the woman, she seemed to know from before who would be interested in her wares and would be calling out to them while their backs were turned; those she called always came to see the trinkets that were heaped on her cart, and those she did not, seemed to ignore the cart, treating it as if it were invisible and walking past it as if it were not there.

This was quite different from Harpreeti's experience, who usually had a lot of trouble selling anything, whether she called after her customers or not.

"Blue jays calling in the evening light!

Their eyes gleaming from the nest ajar

The wisps of grass and twigs form a gauze

From which they peer to choose their prey.

Oh, listen to their crisscrossing songs,

The score that flies from their chirruping beaks!

It will tell you where they dive to eat!

It will show you the intentions of men's hearts!

They will show you where to walk in the Lord's ways!

They will show you how to be shrewd business women!

Following a childish instinct, Harpreeti made a beeline for the cart, and asked the girl how much one bracelet would cost.

"Four Rupiya," was the reply.

"Oh, Jat woman, you are only asking for something with which to adorn your wrist! That is why there is such a low price."

"I never thought it was a low price," said Harpreeti musingly. "But, let's just say it's reasonable."

"Do you know what I'm worried about?" said Harpreeti. 'That if the British succeed in taking over the Mughal Emperor's tillages, that we will all have to pay even higher taxes than we have now. I haven't got much to do with a turquoise bracelet, but nobody here wants shackles on their wrists.

"Did I say I agree with the taxes levied already?" asked Sania. "They're already higher than they ought to be – it must be hard for landowners as well as sharecroppers, as the wages are determined by the net income from the fields after the taxes are subtracted. I know it now as any woman ever did, taxes levied by monarchs always support some decadence on the part of courtly officials and opulence of manner and attire and lodgings.

"Intemperence breeds neglect," said Amanullah, her brother, entering into the conversation fully, although he had not been asked. The two women turned and made way for him in their speech.

“Neglect of devotion to one’s calling, and one’s beloved deity, whether one be a Hindu or a Sufi. One must listen to one’s inner world, the responsibilities one bears to one’s loved ones.

“Well said,” said Harpreeti. “You speak truly if ever there was a young man who did.

“But yes,” said Sania. “There is the danger that taxes are hiked up to higher than they are right now.”

Harpreeti realised she enjoyed conversing with Sania, this honest yet cheeky salesperson, and her brother Amanullah, this sarcastic yet sincere lad, with whom she could say what she really thought, and not be ignored or bludgeoned by a barrage or an onslaught of mathematical methods and information, although her own brother tried his best, she knew. But for once, she wasn’t being patronised, she felt.

Sweet smelling cliffs clung to by heather and bracken

High mountains to climb carefully

Deep caves and caverns dark and yawning

Dripping stalactites of lyme gleaming in the spare light

Leathern hillsides carved and barren

Now erupt with flowering gul-mohar shrubs

Nourished by cascading, bubbling waterfalls

Volcanic rock and lava flows

Fodder for the fir trees and roots

Which weather them to soil.

A maiden runs among the grasses singing, her arms outstretched and whirling round, her skirts and apron whirling round like rings round Saturn’s shell, leading sheep, stepping forward barefooted, feeling stones and shards of crystal neath her supple soles, her ankles tied with bells, her arms carrying a staff and a scythe, running fore-wards carefully, nimbly as a mountain goat.

The storm gathers on the horizon; she and her flocks will take shelter in a cave. Blue abalone coloured sky, glittering and flashing with lightning, and the grey blue necks of pigeon coloured clouds. Real pigeons flutter and roost in the rafters of the cave, hiding out from the storm. She befriends them looking at them with sincerer eyes and cocking her head from left to right, as they do the same to her, curiously and inquiringly.

A quarrelling, bickering stream, under the dome of the sky, reflecting the signs of the clouds. The vault of heaven, carved like a mausoleum carved out of blue stone. Clouds swirling across it in the words of the Quran. Deep, grey-blue, sinuous, chattering along.

The sky, patterned with clouds, like puffs of dragon’s breath, or loads of steam from an engine, or broccoli, drifting here and there among the dust particles, around which the water vapour has crystalized, which is how the clouds are formed.

Some rain clouds, some dry day clouds.

She saw stardust on her fingers today. A piece of glittering hair, or a strip of dust, that broke every time she felt it with her nail. A veritable piece of ether, a strip of gold, airy fairy, the kind that hangs in the air supported by a spider’s cobweb.

Beyond interest rates and investments, look at the clarity of the bubbling stream now. Can you see its stones, underneath the whirring, glassy glissades? Can you see how its branches bend near the edge of the stream and how their leaves are jewelled by drops of water like shining eyes or the dew-fall on flowers?

Can you see how the grown squirrels hide their pine nuts in the small hollows of tree trunks for them and children to eat? Have you seen how the baby squirrels run to and fro on the paving stones, their tails whisking and curling like lamps with flame? And how the eyes of the veiled woman who feeds them, light up and sparkle, her forehead and cheeks and jowls crinkles with friendly lines when she gathers her squirrels into her arms, which run to and fro and roost on her head and shoulders?

"They love when you befriend them," she says welcomingly. "Do not be afraid to be yourself when you are out in the world. "Forgive people of their judgements, but do not judge people in return."

Magenta veils and denim, long sleeved tops, brown skirts with mirrors round the bottoms, weathered, veined, strong, dark hands, bangled wrists, digging and building ponds and wells in a dry environment.

Today was an inspiring workday. Twenty women, in which she was included, cleared a 20 square foot pond out of the dry and rocky village earth for recharging ground-water. They used part of the cleared earth for building an embankment wall around the pond, as well as for building bunds around their field to prevent the rushing rainwater from causing soil erosion, and sold some of the rest of the remaining soil for a land reclamation project that was ongoing in Gujarat.

***Evergreens, long spindles of dusty, grey green, pines of ratcheted junipers, laden with snow, hung with silvery bells, shaded by the bulk of the mountain, leaning over the mouth of the cave.

A girl who is sympathetic has sent geese from the shackles or anklets of her feet hurtling, flying up into the sky, unpinioned.

Thus the prisoner sat, his face upturned to the light at the mouth of the cave.

Her blessings have unlocked my spirit from sin, from slavery to the darkness. Now I will walk freely among the trees, roots and moss, grateful for my eyes which are windows to the light.

Baths of streams, spilling into little lees and small rivers, branching, forking into distributaries, trickling, whispering, mingling into channels of rocks and pebbles and shells.

Rainbows emanating from moonstones, shining like beacons.

***

Grief was winter pools and cyclones and willow trees leaning into lakes, their branches stirring the water in tiny ripples that moved ever outwards like rings growing in a tree.

Once already she had lost Shiela, and found her again through a rescue mission, never again would she allow herself to lose her sister, to anybody else, not ever, at whatever cost to herself.

Everybody in the region now knew how Sheila had been lost, and then again found, by rescuers on a mission, and restored to her elder, and that life must be lived out fully at home. Everything that had seemed ordinary seemed special now, now that she had lost it and found it again.

Yasinia would be forever grateful to the helicopters that found Sheila, for having fed and clothed her and returned her safe and sound to her older sister and brother. She had repaid them with a calf and cow and now, Sheila's schooling back into the old ways was to be looked to.

As she poured water from one jar to another, she remembered the way the water she was pouring from the pitcher to the tub, swilled and swirled like a daisy spiral as she let it fill the tank in a stream. Would she ever be truly at home again?

Yasinia churned like a girl stirring up a storm in the milk, swilling the stick between her palms until it chattered like a lightning whirlwind against the pail. At other times, she swilled the rod around slowly, getting flecks of butter off the sides of the pot into the main mass.

"Did I tell you the story of the man who went to heaven? Asked Yasinia her sister Sheila. "He used to pull barges and rafts and canoes up and down river when people wanted to travel that aways.

"Someday, he had old folk visiting their married daughters, or other days, they had merchants transporting their wares, or others' children, travelling to study in the madrasa of the nearest town, another time a small boy towing a monkey which he used to bid perform infront of an audience.

"One day, when he was transporting such passengers, the boy's monkey, in playing with the string the boy was dangling on a stick infront of it, fell into the stream and began to be carried away by the currents of the river. The small boy was distraught and tried to leap into the water to save it. But the boy at the helm, who was older than him by several years, told him to stay in the canoe, man the oars, and the helmsman himself jumped into the water to retrieve the drowning monkey.

"He swam quite a distance downriver, and finally grabbed the animal which was spluttering and wheezing and clasped it to his breast and swam towards the boat to the crying owner. He gave the monkey to the boy, saying, "Never again, shall you tease and bait your monkey with a string and a stick on a boat in a turbulent river."

"The boy, seeing his own mistake vowed never again to do so, and cradled the monkey in his arm which clung to him like a limpet. And the oarsman, for risking his life to save an animal, went to the first heaven where he became an angel, and served camel's milk to travellers passing along. In this way, he became a servant of sojourners and himself travelled many miles on sunlit wings to minister to the needs of earthly beings who traversed. We see in this tale the idea that one must be kind to animals as well as to human beings and that there is much merit and reward in helping all who cross one's path and need assistance."

When she was young, because she wanted to be able to tell her beloved brother Ahmet and sister Yasinia everything, she strove to be competent and good in all matters, to be creative, dependable, hardworking, thrifty, and intelligent, for those indeed were the gems of a noble pastoral life.

As she and Wajma sheared the wool of the sheep, taking care that the animals did not run away under the blades, she thought of how soft the wool was, of how Ahmet would love running his hands through it and spinning it into wool or cloth.

'Tis like cloud," she said. "Or like handling the sheep hands on, or like carrying rabbits. It hops, bounces from your hands the moment you lay hands on it. It offers warmth, cuddling the person who holds it.

Ahmet always left a little wool for Sheila to play with on her own when she gave the bulk of it cleaned to him. Understand how we transform materials, he said to his little sister. How one becomes the other, how the milk you drink is turned into strength and knowledge, water into coolness and refreshment, the Christians drink wine although we do not, as we know that the name of the Bestower in praise is intoxication enough.

Understand how our labour adds surplus value to the things we process, turning them from unusable things to usable, saleable, salvaged and capable of salvaging both soul and body, keeping us warm, giving us shelter, buying us sustenance. And it is always the case that one who wastes

resources not only wastes them, but wastes himself, be they of sustenance, scrip, sheep's wool, water or time.

Woe to the man who considers himself supreme, for he will be brought under. Woe to the man who is rich, but will not share of his goods with the needy, for he will not prosper. Woe to the man who works his servants hard without recompensing them, for he shall stumble.

Happy is the man or woman whose lifework helps his or her neighbors and larger society, the fisherman who is judicious in his net casting, not plying his boats in breeding season and who sells his fish at opportunity cost so that the maximum number of people can afford them and he is able to cover the cost of his endeavors. Happy is the man who plants his land with sturdy seeds, who weeds but at harvest leaves sheaves of wheat on the ground for gleaners to take."

***

The nomads' own sheep were bedraggled and burly with fleece, thin, wasted, fit -- some would call them emaciated underneath their coats with the great walking they had done between their summer grounds and winter pasture. They ran back and forth, mixing with Sheila and Yasinia's goats, baaing and railing for weeds to chew upon. Avan, who had been resting awhile in her newly erected tent, ran out and coaxed them into order with a stick, spearheading the flock for pasture. She scanned the horizon for clouds with her palm on her forehead to keep away the glare and said: no rain clouds threaten in either way, nor east nor west; we may go forth without fear of a thunderstorm waylaying us.

Sheila stood upon the rock and felt the old excitement; she, not Ahmet today, would be taking the goats to pasture. She felt the wind blow through her, as if she were a sail filling with torrents of breeze or a strand of hair fluttering hither and thither, moored and anchored only by her bare and steady feet. She turned, like a gull upon the shore, and held out her hand to Alyona the goat, which was filled with clover and the milk augmenting herb, put her face close to Alyona's muzzle, and muttered to her, eat of this, my girl, and may your kids live

Yasinia, her cloak billowing, walked up to her and handed her a bowl filled with stew and bread, said, your lunch. Sheila thanked her softly. You're quite high, said Yasinia. Don't take them too far uphill.

The goats ran, charged and capered all across the river, surging up into the higher plains above the basin, collecting like flecks of cream on a moustache, homing in on the shrubs and herbs that grew, trampling the grasses that sprung up dutifully when they had released their hooves form the springy reeds, nibbling around the irises and cornflowers and clover, butting each other and wrangling on the cliff drop heights.

Sheila looked Avan up and down, thinking of the grey bits of wool she wanted to weave into a shawl and began to appraise what she needed for the craft of mountain fashion. Avan was wearing a grimy, mint green shirt with buttons down the front and a collar folded over her shoulders, and a full, brown skirt that swirled when she climbed. The shawl would look good on Avan, she thought.

And the climbing that they did! From their tents and huts down to the river, with their sparkling vessels which they had bought stainless steel in the local shop of the nearest town, thrice a day, first to collect water and bathe, and then to wash their dishes, and then to graze their goats on higher pastures up the mountainside.

Sloping hills, a simmering half of a crag; furrows grazing the slopes, rings of fire and smoke; a river of ribbons of gleaming silver wire, coiling themselves down the cliffs, thistle and pine clothing its valleys, thorn and holly bedding them.

Sheila began to sing of all the good things that grew there and in the valleys nearby. "Apples, grapes, a shower of leaves, almonds, dates, vines of these; cascading fountains rich with greens, trees and shrubs growing from the glowing water; watermelons, pineapples, figs and coconuts from which to swig and to refresh oneself, goats bleating, horses whinnying, sheep taking the hills in thrall, squirrels gathering, chipmunks chattering, deer leaping and grazing and squalling. In the oasis, in the forest, in the desert, camels walking, their humps undulating, their tongues curled neatly between their teeth, their hooves knocking up water from the rarest aquifer of sand, so sharp are they like bits of broken glass. A smiling woman, leading them on leashes, her cheeks like lemons.

"A shining shack, a stray strand of light, swaying and pouring, shimmering bright, like corn-shucks, chestnut, a girl's wood shavings, hair hanging in a treasury of curls. The suggestion of a girl walking in the shadows, the music of the river in the dancing of her dark limbs. In the shade of a tree, the parrots squawking, the figs falling, pecked at by sparrows. The heart of a young sparrow bird, beating in the thin frames of a chick's ribcage, struggling wings, fluttering like the beating of a heart, the drum of its own blood. The girl walking like a heron treading water, her feet carving tracks on the dust floor, printing arches and the fingers of toes. Doorframes sleek as nomad's arms, twisting, ensconcing in the harsh blaze of sunlight outside.

Avan told her, "We are a people of walking, of yearning roses, of blue skies shot with scudding clouds, of eagles and parakeets opening wide their wings to shield us, of scarves like flying owls, and sleeves detailed with designs of creeping leaves and arbours, mountain valleys filled with slopes of periwinkles, crocuses poking up through seasoned snows, glaciers carved with hawk's feet into signs and verses bleeding into rivers.

We are the people that wade through icy, stone shattered brooks, wearing the foam for anklets, and the fragrance of the cross branched shrubs for bracelets, and the eleven full moons shining in the dark winter night for crowns, using mist as veils for our eyes, and shame's blush to beautify our cheeks.

We are a hard people with no home but our calloused feet and wasted haunches, our lodges a temporary shelter from the hiking between gleaming dawn and falling dusk, bucket and bucket of water we draw from the stream to wash our dishes and beat our clothes against the washing stones. No clocks but the shade and tall pillars of light lengthening and shrinking from sun to sun, casting webs of luminescence among the tangled branches and spider's webs and beehives nesting in trees, along with the sparrow's snarls of twigs and hay shining in an amulet against the lizards and other predatory birds who swoop to snatch the eggs and chicks from their place of resting, rather they hide in the sweet darkness from these talons and beaks."

***

Yasinia looked at Sheila once as though appraising her and said: "We must not neglect our animals, and milk the nanny goats; they are waiting to be divested of their heavy drink." The woman staggered outside; raised her hand up to the sky to scan the horizon and spot a goat that was going astray. "yet we must let the little ones suck first," she muttered, caressing her forearms with her cracked and wizened wasted palms. "They are hungry and thirsty, waiting to consume their fill. We must curtail their anguish." She skirted round the bare and twisted tree infront of the mud hut, and lifting up her skirts, pelted after the straying goat, saw it was a ram with bells on its horns. Sheilaran forth and pushed it into its pen.

She sat with the goat twisting its spare locks and fur round her nimble fingers, and the goat rubbed its cheekbones against her, bells jingling as it still was chewing some of its sparkening heather. Yasinia said to Shiela: remember when you and Aref were sucklings just like this one? You both needed peace and silence or the gentle murmuring of your mother's voice in a song. Yasinia uttered a low incantation and circled her hands round the kids' horns, then its neck, looping round its trotting hooves, whispered: may you go in and come out of the deep cavern at the copse, may you

have sweet afternoon rest prance in gladness all your days, may you graze in bright light, and may you sleep curled in warmth next to your brothers and your sisters, always to continue as the rising and looping of the sun day by day.

The ritual over, Yasinia readied the pail beneath Fatima the goat and began to milk her, telling Shiela, you milk her, and we'll combine the pails for a churning." "Oh, do we have to?" complained Shiela. "We had better if we want to take it to market tomorrow," said Yasinia, looked at Shiela, said, "We need to churn after" pushed her sleeves up her wrists, slathered her black, cracked hands with butter. Shiela had a kid called Aslam and Sheila reluctantly caught him by the hind legs and brought him to his mother, standing on restless legs that bucked against the handling. "He is such a restless sweet caperer," said Shiela. "With little ladels for horns and orchids for hooves." Milk came streaming down into the pail, thick and white. "Tis time for a rubbing down," Yasinia said and caught Fatima by the ribs, saw she wanted to amble some after being milked, let her wander. She dabbed some oil into her hands and stalked off after Shiela, took her into her arms and gave her a swift rubbing down so that her flanks glistened, her breathing eased and she stood swaying and listening.

Then Yasinia rose from her haunches and drew water from the well to wash the ewe off. "These pails are ready for the churning," said she.

"Kindle soft and kindle lightly;

May thy lines be girt like dawning

Grow to be as bold as sunlight

May thy hooves be fleet and soaring

When the pails are full with milking

May you be as you had drunk your fill

And never have the tossing fitful sleep of the disturbed

May you always be close to your kin

May you be fed for having fed us

May you ever come full circle

***

Always remember, remember, how the soldiers of our land, the martyrs of our village, gave their lives to fight off the invading Russians. The Russians had bombs, mines and rifles, our Mujahideen had only the flintlock rifles they had captured during the Indo-Afghan war, and some chemical explosives they were taught to make to stall the enemy's progress, but still, they fought and they died, they prayed and eventually won the war, and the invaders had to get their asses out of the country, sorry they had ever tried to take it captive.

***

"To travel is to have rich eyes and poor hands" in that one sees the golden wheat sown, the sunshine of the dried hay pitched and baled into barns, the black cotton soil drained of all its crop and sent to the gins, to participate in the work is to mock the hierarchy of labour, with intellectual at the top and manual at the bottom; you get off the tractor and set to work with the other organised labourers, to set to work furrowing the soil with ploughs and shovels; then sowing seeds, then bringing up saplings, then maturing them, harvesting and transporting them to market.

Mandalas and rangolis of spider's webs in which peacocks roost, nests hide eggs where neither snakes nor mongoose can reach. Fishing nets and scarves contain a compass.

Neon pink crocuses on a black sari, tied in a knot at the back. A brown girl wears this garment, which blows about her as she hacks at the soil with her spade.

Kind little chrysanthemums popping up at the edges of the field. Roses, gladioli and canna, the first the rose, in the whorled scallop shell conch shape of a spiral dust cloud or cumulus, the second, like the effusions of white vapour gas from a spirit lamp, the third, like a flame or a bird of paradise alighting on a green shoot of grass, an arrow on a greenwood bow, or a coral earring on a mermaid's algaed earlobe.

Today, wash me in the exuberant joy fountain of the world;

That comes from the storehouse of happiness

Cleanse me of all dirt, lowliness and meanness that

Still clings to my mind.

This net of sleep that entangles my being,

Brush away with your dusting-cloth.

(Tagore, "Wash it")

The Lord has made me glad with days, with time that grows and work that multiplies and never fades

Roses may bloom and seaweed washed up on the beach may wither, but the Lord has strengthened me with hope and with righteousness, schooling me in his ways.

With the wind calling, winnowing, keening and scouring among the pillars of the temple, the stalactites and stalagmites of the cave, the dunes of earth, covered with tufts of grass half submerged in puddles of clear and murky rainwater, bending the saplings of bamboo grasses roof high, black and silver barked deodar and pine, the shingles of the roof of baked clay threatening to slide off the sloping roof and fall and smash on the cement below, the houses on stilts bending; only those built on a platform of mud carved from the bottom of the pond are steady, but the dwellers pray that what with the moss growing on the surface, the lashing water won't gain a stronghold on the mud, dissolving and reducing it to a patch of slurry.

A patch of weeds growing from soiled gaps in the cement; reddish brownish green, shamrocks nodding on the passing monsoon breeze, trembling, with little droplets of dew and rain gleaming atop the leaves and on their margins like tiny strewn diamonds, hewn and cast onto the spirit of the plants, the whole of which is like a gemmy diadem growing out of the drudgery of the universe. Beauty and complexity emanate from it, like the funnelling of air through a tunnel; or like the blooming of the hands and arms and head in enlightenment.

"He offered an ephah of flour, a skin of wine, and a goat.

Fragrances pleasing to the Lord.

But Christ Jesus offered his own body, mind and heart,

Which bled to death on the cross,

And made a sin offering to redeem us all."

The stony remains of walls and cisterns of a broken fort, white stones blackenend and covered with moss mildew and mud, broken, cracked pathways in which violets grow in the cracks, and snow slowly drifts through the air, covering all the material, organic and inorganic with a white, thin, flighty, feathery layer of frost.

Pigeons, swans and ducks clucking and chattering, fluttering among the stones, pecking at molluscs and insects, swimming on the nearly frozen lake and flapping their wings so that the water spraying in arcing droplets, necklaces of diamonds on the air, hanging on the cold wind, the green lake rippling and sloshing.

Green, sparkling tea leaves picked from the tall, skeletal shrub grown on a hillside of well-drained soil. Mrinmoyee picks the leaves deftly, placing them in a tub which is strapped to her shoulders, she has picked the flush, the two to three leaves blooming on the axial tip of the branch. She is wearing a brown and red sari on her thin frame which contrasts brightly against the emerald green and pink of the leaves of the tea shrubs, the golden-brown branches and the blue, bottomless sky crossed and shadowed by fleece like clouds.

In the wind, the tea shrubs seem to nod almost as though they are the eyelashes on a brown skinned maiden weeping when the storm passes and rains down her cheeks in geological tears.

Wing feather shadows cast upon her cheeks,

Or her eyes are lakes, spring pools at the bottom of the hills in which the towns, with their brick buildings and slanted rooves, pagoda-ed temples and monasteries and smokestacks are reflected.

Her body is the trunk of the deodar, dotted with white and brown sari of snow and bark, her arms, its branches. Bearing the signs of eternal youth with its greenish tinge of greenwood near the tips and the new grown bits.

The petals of the lotus flower are all embracing;/ Blooming atop the waves of the lake/ Improvised from the impurities of mud, sludge, slime and water/ But fresh and coloured pink, white or blue,/ Near mount Kailash where Shiva performed asceticisms./ The shrine of the Sufi Gul Mohammed is but a shack;/ But oh see the glorious fruits of people's devotion there!/Dancers twirling, their hair and skirts flying out as they reach ecstasy/reciters chanting, beating their breasts and cutting themselves/For the persecution of Hassan and Hussein/Chanting the moving words of the Quran that cannot be chained, /In as careful, soaring tones as people reciting the rosary/As doves soar with eagles near the meeting place of the convex winds; the sun's rays scattered by fraktaline gatherings of droplets that are the clouds; their feathers waterproof, smelling of poultry, streaked with black and brown dye, or purple/Grey-blue, magenta and green iridescent necks;/their toes shod with rings, for some of them are/Homing pigeons. The Lord has given you one more/Day of the week, make use of it./Pray salah when you have no more energy left; it is good for the soul./Their prayers have culminated in rains, long and heavy, for the wheat crop.

A green sash, a moss girdle; turquoise dye and white metal beads; worm by a woman the colour of brick-granite; brown leaves and sequoia wood; whose earrings clamour as she sweeps, with a sash, a dupatta of fine cotton, washed, squeezed out, and folded by hardworking hands.

The house sat ensconced in a little copse bit of forest; of evergreen lindens, alders, and sitka spruce, all over grown with moss; the walls were of cracking plaster, the bricks showing through in places, and over crusted with barnacles, oysters and mussels that clung to the sides of the house like seaweed clung to the sides of a ship, the roof of the house was thatched with hay that had seen many seasons, was greenish, swollen and blackened by rain and fungus rot.

"Farheen, the nanny goat, is getting fat," said Yasinia carefully to Shiela. "You'd better hide her behind the others belonging to Imtiaz next time you take them back to his stables; or he'll sell her to the butcher's block."

“These people here are so cruel,” said Shiela. “Farheen is nursing her kids, that’s why she’s put on weight. She’s grazing more to make milk to feed her children, not because she’s greedy or anything,” she finished. “We’re the ones who look after these animals; don’t you think we should have more say in what happens to them, their fate, how they’re treated?”

Yasinia said, “Ideally, yes. Untill this world has reached a state of cognizance and justice, we must keep fasting periodically, praying and doing all our duties in time.”

The eleven opal coloured silver coins on Yasinia’s forehead’s jade coloured veil flashed as she talked; her cheeks flushed and her arms gesticulating about Allah’s justice and how he loves not the prodigal.

“Remember how the Israelites complained about not getting to eat meat after they came out of Egypt and were given manna, the bread from heaven? Then in answer to their mutterings, God gave them meat that rained down from the sky, and when they weren’t able to eat it all in one day and it began to rot, and stink, and those who ate it, nevertheless, died. Plus, now they’re saying people should be eating less meat now that the climate is warming, both for our own health and for the climate common’s sake.”

The next day, they went out to milk cows before dawn light, before the butter tangerine lemon sliver sun has risen in the marine lode clouds, tossing as chestnut roots turning and wheeling among shreds and curls of orange peel of the snaking roots of a tall and branching tree. The cracking, creaking of crusting bark, among the ratcheting, leaning, bridging pines, peeling with rough tough fringes that comes unspooling, creeling.

Protective scales from a crocodile, a canary chick shivering off pieces of shell from its wing as it uncases itself from the yolk, its yellow sunbird feathers rising out of the lime, and mining the dance of eagle feather wings ruffling on a high, sweeping, soaring slipstream.

Philomena’s twenty one year old sister Fatima was a girl with two plaits popping out of her un-sleek, well tangled head like screwelling carrot or fluffy unicorn horns or jute /braids, thatched hay ropes spiralling and reeling like hanging banners of magenta light streaming through the sky or the tripping laddern rungs uneven curtains hung of clouds, a blue-green cornstalk weave , silk stair up which fairies could climb/tread/rappel with their star-dusty feet.

Sweeping powder blue skies unfolding like a hawk’s silent wings; she circled like a swooping bat, a circling swan, a gull flying in rings.

Two girls meet three boys in the Panjshir valley; one is a seasonal farmer, another a cowherder, and a part time servant girl; the three boys are carpenter’s apprentices, goatherds and kiln-boys keen for rendezvous.

They formed a circle and began to recite spells and prayers so that the snows on the mountain tops would remain, not cascade into streams that rushed past fields eroding their fertile alluvial and washing it into the sea.

“As the glacial grooves and drilled ruffled channels that crack, shatter to give glass like strews of shards, and melt, shrewd, elegant snow-flakes lattice letting in the sun, like lampshade mesh framework, or the profiled silhouette of lilies against the brightening patterned enamel noon day sky, the jewel’s shone of the midday star of the Venus neon sun of the fierce blue dart stuffed scuffing clouds.

They come to meet on the hill, where one came to graze her cow, the other to gather wild moonbright sapphire periwinkle, another to find blue lotus, lavenders and tiger lilies spotted and dashed, poked, jabbed and prickled, with a delicate sprinkling of sunspots, creeping, kissed, freckles,

to weave into wreaths for the goats of the herd on the day of reckoning, which is also the day of realised gratitude and the solution of the mystery of leading visions.

Butter cups, lupins and sunflowers, forget me nots, sparks and embers of larkspur, jasmines and violets. Chrysanthemums, streaming cornflowers, cynthias, hyacinths, with fetlocks of emerald green grass rising from the rocks of the hill.

From their chipping flints which the boys and girls beat in circles and rows, flew partial stones and streaks of fire, lava from the volcanic chasing embers trailing from the chimney in a high wind, tigers, leaping, flamingo's spread, ginger's reaping, forest flame's flowers, speeding, red, rose-petals, scarlet phoenix feathers shed, arrows leaning bursting piercing, darting showering cloud shields rolled watery dipped blood tinged and flew.

"As we turn,

Galacial lights are spinning,

As we turn,

In circles and in rows.

As we turn,

A mighty silver bugle hung,

As we turn,

With ravens and with crows.

A spell to hold back the insistent warming of the pastures and air, that was wreaking havoc with the seasons.

Their livestock joined in as well, jaws clacking, throats yipping, snipped hooves clipping. Tails wiggling, hindlegs flapping, flanks pulling, snouts sneezing, tumbling like rags in a fire, down the downy hillside, bladed and edged with spades and pricking ears of grass and colombine, washed juniper rose tall into the air like pointed fountains or galaxies, showers of the milky way, circling and tossing, like the darts of diamond showers of a leaping, juggling spring.

Wajma, headscarved and strong, stood in the doorway of her tent, her feet buckling inwards, another Kurdish herder girl who had just migrated with her family's tribe to set up camp on the land adjacent to Sheila and Yasinia and Aref's household and fields. The girl had cowrie shells hanging from a circular band fastened onto her veil, wrapped around her forehead. You could not see the colour of her hair for each strand was meticulously pulled back and tucked under the cloth, protecting the outside world from the scorch of their fire. She knew the saying that hair should not be seen as it carries a kind of power that ensnares those unfamiliar men, netlike, who look upon it. If they had seen it, they would have seen that it was ebony and waved, as a blackberry bush, covered with fruit, as a raven's wing glossy and shining in the moonlight as it caws upon a branch, or as stirring waters of a night-time tidal stream.

The girl said to them, "Watch, watch how the light cascades from the window panes of your house and prints a lattice screen on the glades and grass clearing below! This place is most hallowed, most blessed by the Lord of the Worlds, I shall not say, it must needs have had an effect on you, influencing your learning; rather, we see it thus both because God meant us to see it that way, cast the grass to be ignited by the spindles of sunlight, which he flung afar and wide, in between where foals and mares graze, along with curly sheep and raggedy goats that drag their feet along the slopes of the mountain, now skipping, now faltering as they trample up the steep roads, their thin legs and scraggly, shaggy coats wavering in the mist. Does your mother make you do a lot of work,

is she strict with you or easy on you usually? You look like a proper hollering, tough working girl, weathered and rough, inured to labouring for your family, I daresay." Her eyes flashed.

"And there's no getting out of the toil, just as there's no getting out of the ritual prayers!" Sheila and Avan exclaimed together, repeating an old Farsi saying with their own additions to its structure. "But surely, surely there is relief, for when we study the Word at the mosque, or look up into the clouds at day, or the stars at night, or read our geography textbooks or draw pictures in our notebooks or talk with our sisters and mother."

"Sister, Avan and I, we will go to pasture together today," said Sheila to her older sister Yasinia. "After the water is collected."

They looked ahead, at the copse which hid a stream, and further by, a pond in which lilies and their pads floated.

"Make sure not only you, but your livestock also get along," said her mother.

"We will of course," said the two, looking at each other laughing, and they began to walk, their herds following close behind, goats and sheep, soon to crossover and mingle like molasses and milk.

They crossed the emerald field of the copse, wooded with brown and white stems of trees, whose branches rose like lanterns to brush the scrubbed blue sky and stopped briefly at the fountain, which was actually a little bubbling spring, surging and falling from and on the sharp pebbled and rocky ground.

Sheila, pumping her arms to get the water out of the well and into her buckets, bent, pushed at the windlass, turning, creaking and then hooked the two buckets to the pole which she bent under, and rose to lift them like a bird rising under the full force of the wind beneath its wings. Walking slowly, she scurried among the drying acacia trees and up the path to her and Yasinia and Aref's house. She was on her way, staggering and dragging. Avan took the bucket from her and lead them into Sheila's house, as Wajma began the long trek up hill with thte goats and sheep behind her, slowly so that the others could catch up. Sheila thanked her.

"Stay, stay, said Sheila, "You will see how deft we are when we shear fleece together," said she, one word tumbling over the other when she spoke, excited and thrilled to have co-herders to go forth with at last. How many hours and weeks till Avan and Wajma became a part of Sheila's own family, until their tribes two rivers flowing from different mountains, became a part of the same brook, dashing and tripping over the planes and stones to the distant sea beyond the port of Quetta in Pakistan, their neighbor?

"And I shall aid the both of you and Aref in your work and keep you company," said Avan. "I am a seasoned shepherdess and know how to find green fragrant pastures for our flock folk and know how to nurse sick lambs back to health."

A boy was running, panting behind to catch up with them. "Wait up!" he yelled. "Oh, It's Aref," Sheila said. "Wait for me!" He drew closer, carrying a satchel of bread and cheese and grapes for their lunch. "You'll go hungry if you don't."

"Oh, let's slow down," said Sheila pityingly. "Wait for my poor brother."

"Oh, do." Said Avan, stopping.

"Continue girls, as you were saying before," he said sanctimoniously, and slowed his pace as he caught up.

"Well, it takes dandelions and clover flowers, the shamrocks and chickweed stems, grey dust combined with pine needles and maple leaves, fern, moss and bark of the gulmohur to wreak the

good sorcery on them, and to cure ailing stomachs. Also, river water washed with sage and tulsi, to clear their nerves and make them pert and scampering again.

"And don't forget the bark of the cypress and the guttation of the sour olive tree leaves," Sheila added to the long list.

"Indeed, add those as well," Avan said dreamily, and continued walking, putting one arched foot infront of another as she walked gracefully like an acrobat strutting aboard a tight rope. "And it will be a boiling concoction, either raw for the goats to chew, or stewed for them to drink.

"What sort of a girls are you both?" asked Aref. "Witches or what?"

"I wouldn't say like that," Sheila answered, gazing across the mountains at the rising sun. "I reckon she likes birds and cats and trees and even thinks of the lambs she carries for others, the members of flocks in the herd she leads, as her own. I think that for all our pride and prattle we are a sort of children that we shall like roaming with her as our friend and fellow herder, shall we not," she finished, determinedly, to her friend and brother. She checked the portion in her satchel. "Aref, be sure you take some of this bread, cottage cheese and fruit, or you'll go hungry as well."

"That, I won't," said Aref. "Our older sister Yasinia's making lunch for the two of us in the house. This is for the both of you."

"Aref is sweet," said Sheila.

"Thank you, dear boy," said Avan.

"I'm not 'dear boy', said Aref.

"Then, dear brother."

"I should like it if you were my sister," said Aref carefully.

"Then I shall be?" Avan asked."

"Let us the three of us be related. It's our secret."

"When the fox children come out to play with the foals, we have a fine time keeping the baby horses safe," said Avan. "They stand in the leathern roofed tent, stood on shaky legs their flanks rising and falling rapidly as they suck milk, and when they are sated, the mother mares bite their tails and give them a licking down with their rough tongues. The baby foals go to sleep on their feet, leaning against their mothers' ribs. Then when the baby foxes peep in, the foals trot out to play with them, and the animals tumble and nip and swat and lick and chase each-other in the tangled grasses and weeds laced with flower petals and thorns. It is not so much the danger of the foxes themselves, but the horses tramp everywhere when they are with them, following the foxes, who lead them unwittingly to wolves' trails and mountain lion's caves, from which they sometimes never return."

"Let us use this parable to make sure neither of our families regard the other as the fox, leading their foals into the peril, so that our people can maintain peace and cordial relationships," said Avan carefully.

"Have you ever felt discriminated against?" Sheila asked.

"Me? Oh, I don't like to complain. Although sometimes we get wind of mutterings from some local people who don't want us around. We're itinerant, See, we don't have our own land, we don't have a home, save perhaps the ground encircled by our poor houses, our yurts …"

Sheila told her then that mother had been,

A lass, asking for bread, graceful, round calved, slender and strong,

A shining nose-ring like the sickle moon on her cheek, like waters of a swirling river in the evening, lit in curves by moonlight

Her eyes like twin black marbles, her gypsy brows

Knitted with worry and sad tangles, wondering how she can see it through.

Why she is reduced to begging, she won't tell, but the baby at her bosom cries

And the tears well, and the creature clings and grabs her,

And scratches her, wanting to be fed now.

Given the coins, her eyes sparkle with gratitude; she has other siblings to feed as well.

Her husband and she work backbreaking and nose wrinkling labour at construction sites and rag-picking;

It's like erecting palaces from the shattered stones of an earthquake or avalanche that her people /people of her kind, will never live in.

Or like separating orange peel from mud, or plastic from milk and dough and almonds, pistachios,

Things thrown away by the rich that she would have had to have worked three non-stop days to ever be able to afford for her family to eat.

A mosque, pietra-dura lined; inlaid with leaves of jade and flower petals of lapis lazuli and ruby, its lattice worked screens of ivory shading the place of worship from common view, of passers by who are not Muslim.

But their chants, the calls of the muezzin spreading far and wide lie a net to ensnare the emotions of all and sundry who have a heart, faith in goodness and eyes to see all God's wonderful creation.

Her mother arranged for the rigging of the tent, their home, by erecting the poles and by covering, strapping and stringing sweet smelling bamboo and grass mats along with the half dirty, dusty purple, blue, green and pale-yellow loom made tapestries so that there was no gap except door and smoke-hole through which the winter wind could blow or make chilly.

Sometimes, she migrated to work on other people's farms of wheat, rice or apples, sometimes in winter, she would have to clothe her slender, frail looking but strong, agile and sturdy frame with woollen shawls, skirts and stocking, sweaters, scarves and hijab. Her dark skin contrasted against the pale, pastel, some intensely embroidered and worn-out woollens and brocaded linen, which she had received second hand from her older sisters when she had still lived in her own mothers' home.

"How many siblings do you have?" asked Avan.

"Two," said Sheila, "Although they are not related to me by blood, they are my refuge and my only kin."

Avan, the older by two years, immediately felt protective of her. "I did wrong to ask you how much work your mother makes you do. You probably do more than your share, more than any child your age ought to be burdened with. Come, come, done together, and it will be lighter. But it will make us strong, and wise, and what is more willing to do Allah's will. Come under this shawl, this wind is chillier than ice, the waft of the mountains, the breath of the caves.

"Dost go to the school?"

"Aye, that I do."

“Then perhaps you can write for my mother a letter to my uncle who lives in Iran and mends trunks in Tabriz.,” said Avan, narrow eyes looking hopeful. “She wants to tell him all that has passed since he broke off from our band to begin working there.”

“Sure, I could do that,” said Sheila. “I wouldn’t mind, of course I’d do it.” They watched the lambs sitting, panting, next to their parents, throbbing, as the lambs’ hearts pumped blood into the fronts of their bodies, making their head, neck, and chests bob and their forelegs shake. It really was the height, the most adorable part of the countryside ever.

They met Yasinia as they were crossing the stream. She hailed them.

“Going out to pasture?” she asked.

They nodded, Yasinia thought, it was hillarious how all the three of them did so, in a medley of nodding and prattling.

“This river,” said Yasinia, “Is turning my land into a ravine. Go around the back and look!”

The three scrambled around the back of the sand hut and stood among the pebbles and the stones. The wind whirled and stirred their veils into whipping spirals that pulled at their frames and made their chaderis balloon out like ghosts.

The water, turquoise and lambent, cascaded at first in the upper reaches of the mountains, and wound its way around in the land like a serpent, eroding and snaking, carving rocks and dirt into the bare brown knolls, within which gorges dived.

“Compassion is the true power, like the river water’s toil,” she said cackling, gazing up into the sky, as more dirt sloughed off the banks, falling in clods into the running stream.

“That which is soft, which is yielding, that which flows and bends and wheedles, that is water, and that erodes most powerfully. It is to that which I owe my land, which the river is depositing, the alluvial from the rocks it carried from the mountains. That is the true thread of my loom.”

Did you see what flash floods we had this July? They did not even wait to ask us whether they should rain on us or no, but just swept past, taking the topsoil clean off and muddying up the water, causing the roiling river to turn tea coloured, cardamom brown.

“But,” said Sheila. If we keep adding the crop residue to the topsoil, turning in the husks, leaves and stalks and the roots to the land, after we have harvested the grain, as well as put goat droppings and cow manure we buy from the market, it should be fine, shouldn’t it? To be sure, the stuff would rot and enrich the earth, nutrifying the land from which the saplings are to sprout and grow.

That brings us to another lesson: the fact that we must use whatever comes our way to as many purposes as we can, never giving it the short shrift, but always stretching uses beyond earthly means/ dreams and turning purposes into chains of needs and wants satisfied, bridges across turbulence, roads across barren plains. And never, ever send a fire over your crop residue, as that is a deed that hastens the process of growth so fast, but kills the bacteria and microbes in the ground.

Weasels, gophers and fishers dwell and burrow in the earth, voles and prairie mice and rabbits. And they make pathways across fields threaded and crossed by butterflies and yellow dandelions, fragrant honey suckle and blue bells and petunias, violets. If you burn the fields, you burn the burrows also, the intricate tunnels with which they have underlaid and riddled the field. These tunnels are like the thread triangles which the women of Easter island make with strings, holding the loops between their own outstretched fingers and splaying them out, superimposed shapes and darting arrows crowning the island, like the etchings of caves.

And these animals make good pets, though being wild they need to be washed before they are taken into a hutch inside the home, or domesticated. They stay out of women's ways, though they do like to stand on the land and watch, follow our movements with their steady drawing brown eyes.

And these rivers, said Yasinia. It must be admitted can avail us if we channel them right, the meandering wash at the level of the plains, can be threaded if we put halves of bamboo canes and line them up tip to hollow tip, against each-other, so that water trickles down them and sprinkles into the little valleys between saplings, the furrows and hollows between the rows of seedlings."

"You'd best go follow your pasture," said Yasinia, to the two of them, Aref was hanging behind. "I'm going to get started with my cleaning."

They walked on and Avan chanted: "A bubbling brook, hard by and hid by the backdoor, of the painted caravan, washing dishes in the stream, as ducks bathe, vigourous, charging and fluttering. A feather, floating on the water like a lily pad, its oily coating keeping it adrift, carps billowing in the gusts of waves, like shells and pebbles, corrugated and lined, crashing against the banks of chaldecony. Sun's rays piecing the bubbles with rainbows, splitting light into arrows of colours, like fractaline leaves, the branches of veins, the stalks of buds, the roots of stems."

The wind stirred to a whirlwind that encompassed the girls, and the sheep and goats in confusion mixed, ran into eachother's ranks, milled and gambolled, a surging mass of livestock that knew no barriers. It was as if she had played a flute to charm them.

"Never, and never my girl, riding far and near …"

They saw another pair of shepherds, climbing among their herd of mountain goats, stumbling and skipping among the vertical hills, meandering and hiking along its paths, forging trails, the springing larkspur towering above their baskets in which they were gathering fodder for their animals to store in their barns, the whispering bamboo, shimmering above them, as if they were waving and etching verses of rapture and wonder upon the sky against whose pallet they wrote.

The hanging drapes of evergreen, blue lakes and of moss and furze, carpeting the hills fell like a veil sequestered their wool, the covers which protect us from the freezing fingers of the temperate dawn which we must brave to give us succour. Indeed, it is among these that our goats and sheep gambol and climb, tottering on their narrow hooves and bleating.

Snow carpets the hilltops like fur or fleece, made golden, soft purple and pink, with a tinge of sad blue by the sun; Kangchendzongna like peaks' rays break into fracatlline twists of light, expanding and illuminating the hair of the climbers, turning a rich red or sorrel thatched head into a bale of straw, and turning light hair silhouetted against it dark, raven, smoky.

Wajma's sister's two eyes shining at her like black buttons in a starry night, bright and cheerful, cheeks rosy and mocking, pinched like the furze on peaches and wrinkled like the red skin on roasted apples. A checkered skirt, made up from an old school uniform from her younger days, and a red sweater. Richly skinned, filigree boned hands, padded with adipose and ample, and covered with silver, sun-burned brown skin.

I shall weave you another basket when I have the time," Wajma's sister told her diligently. Of cane and grass, of bamboo and acacia branches, ductile like those wires they use on electrified houses, mint clean, straw coloured, yellow, gold, tea coloured, looking like the baskets the Northeasterners use for collecting tealeaves and storing them in the baskets on their backs.

Why thanks, she said, but you could give it to Mama instead, she'll need it for her cow fodder.

I always feel sorry for them when you mention the tea tribes, she said. They weren't even native to the region, Santhals, Mundas, Gonds and Jaintias who were 'transported to the British tea estates' to serve as labour on the fields, collecting tea leaves to flavour rich people's beverages, when they

themselves had to survive on as little as one meal a day, if even that. It is unthinkable how their country was stormed by the British, who won by divide and rule, when our Pashto was so fierce they bit them gone within a few months of entry. But our Pashto had the benefit of self rule for centuries, and had been the dominant group where they lived, whereas these tribals had been subjugated by the upper castes even where they lived in forests.

And now, the government is revoking their tribal status. Because they no longer exhibit tribal characteristics, such as subsisting directly off of the land. But instead are seasonal agricultural labourers, landless sharecroppers who work on others' fields and live on a wage so minimal they are impoverished, indentured and wasted. They take orders from people now, rather than being their own masters, because they have no choice. When they used to live like proud princes, albeit harshly under nature's ravages, still their own masters, they now shuffle about among the rows of the plantations, much like chattel slaves.

What is that life? How can you understand it? Only by listening to the voices of the people who are forced to make something of it, to whom it is not the only option, but that they force themselves to own it. Listening to their histories, what is in their memories, their imaginations: words, gestures, metaphors, their dreams, aspirations, their significances to be followed, beliefs, desires. Then what is in the records about them, the environmental ecological geological ledgers of the places they used to inhabit, the tree species, the symbioses that exist, the complex food webs of human, animal, plant in which they had commerce there. Then in the government records of land acquisition, (showing that poverty is a process and not a condition.)

"What is a tribal belonging? It is the word that the way will be weathered to the end, but even then, one is not shackled, but free.

A tribal vison for a good life: "Work hard, be self-sufficient, help others in need of it, be kind, respect one's surroundings and fellow beings, and worship the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Don't make generalizations about situations, but look at them in their specificity. Don't be too quick to give your judgement on things, but when asked, speak your mind as politely and lovingly as possible. Cultivate a democracy in society. Communicate with every member, but in a harmonious and purposeful manner. Allow the marginalised, such as women, children, orphans, and poor men to have their say, and always help those who need it. Someday, they will come to your aid, too.

Fields and gardens, terraces and arbours.

Sweet tea growing hills and baskets

Of pickers, nicked ankles and singeing knuckles and palms,

Joined with lacquer to put the leaf flushes carefully

Into the box they carry, strapped to their shoulders and back.

When will they be free, free from this awful misery?

Of being joined to their machinery of the harvest they cannot divest from their working bodies?

O when? Eating less than one square meal a day, they cannot see their children through school, but have to co-opt their children to come along with them to work?

Nisha's friend Krishna, a twelve year old, works in the tea garden as a tea picker, and so do his mother and brother and cousins. He hardly has a decent coat to keep him safe from the cold. His fingers feel blue when the wintry air buffets his frame, a gush of ice and slush of haily rain in that mountain clime.

"He must come to school, said Yasinia. "We will pay his mother to let him attend. Can you imagine, several generations of illiterate people forced to do this arduous work without the relief of an education?

Self-reflection is a luxury, we educated think, but we treat it as our due. Should not self-reflection and thought projection through writing come as well to someone who works with their body to feed their own and their family's stomachs?

A dream. Now I remember Bejuni, the tribal priestess. She is the sister of Baguli, the sweeper girl and the garbage carrier? She always wears something green and purple. "The unbroken brinjal," she says, her eyes shining. "Is our mascot." She gets up, her back and ribs rising like the oars of a boat, or the slabs of a shed's rising against a newly built house.

Her hair is black, like a raven's wing or blue grapes, tangling long and wavy, just combed, her scalp white and her dark brown cheeks ruddy with cheer and walking, hard work and bashfulness all mixed in together into a stunning cocktail of beauty, one that caused us all a heady excitement as to the guided walk that was to come, the languor of our afternoon sleep past.

Bejuni, the priestess, who doubled up as the sweeper girl, was brilliant and conversational in a canny way. She was from a poor family, and had turned to the profession of showing people around, a guide to whom we turned when we could not navigate the land ourselves, and at the same time held on to her sweeper's job at one of the more expensive tourist lodges we couldn't afford.

She turned, we saw her earlobes were pierced with earrings or the long studs that were the baen needles or pneumatophores that emerge to breathe from the soil, the wet mud in the edges of the Sunderbans forest.

She didn't smoke. She didn't drink. She wasn't like a city girl, and she knew lots of stuff we didn't. How to tell when someone was thinking of you (usually you were thinking of them, or had a premonition,) how to work hard, hauling wood and water in a kettle on her kerchiefed head, how to bend and sow rice in the unwilling soil how to drag a plough through the rocky fields while a shovel was strapped to her back and chest.

She painted her cheeks with the barkpaste makeup that is popular all around the Irawaddy and Ganges river deltas, from Myanmar to Bengal, and carried a bow and arrow strapped to a quiver slung around her slender strong shoulders, and ribs, to ward off the tiger, when it was approaching to kill, and to ward off ghostlike, haint-like spirits that hid in the mist and stole your breath long enough for you to be trapped in the bog, and then captured by tiger, snake, crocodile or pirate, never to be seen again.

But where no arrow could be shot, she would not go. She couldn't go deep into the jungle, thus, into the canals steeped in densely wooded and mud, beyond the falling trees, weirlike, leaning bare and graceful into the river. 'My arrows will not fly there," she said. "And we thus have no defense against the prowling animals who wish to consume human flesh." So we all told her never to go there, nor never to take us there, never to go against her instinct, because that was what protected us all, her canniness about the jungle and her intuition, and her presence gave us springs of joy and marrow, strength for journeys and adventures boatpeople to fare.

A dream. A little child wants to play, with the little goat on the field margins; after some coaxing it obliges. Feeding, grazing, baaing and railing. He bends and whispers to it. "Dear little goat. You are so sweet and happy. I want to be like you."

The little goat turns his head. His eyes shine, and its mouth turns up in a queer little smile. Thrilled, the child squeezes himself into the corner of the doorway, leveraging the book in the crook of his elbows, perched on hir knees, sprightly and squealing.

Running and tottering this way and that, the goat runs and tumbles straight into his lap, and he hugs it to himself, like a shepherd hugging a lost and found lamb, a sister hugging an infant sibling. Its cloven hoof plants a cross in the veins of hir bosom. The same as the cross the people must carry each day to earn their livelihood despite the storms and the salty soil, turning the hoe in the soil, breaking their backs upon the fields'

labour; the cross, the cloven hoof is a symbol of cooperation and coordination and love between man and animal, and among them all, despite and because of differences and divergences.

What underpins our actions, our faith, is our relationship with others. Of reciprocity and exchange. Of love and friendship, of learning and striving. Receiving and working.

Bless those who watch for us and keep us safe. Bless those who work for us and keep us fed. May we never tread upon them and may what we produce be ample to feed them and keep them safe and happy.

Contd. (I realised they are not tantric, but schooled at life, using the day ahead of them as an opened book, which they carefully read and recite, and inured to deprivation, and developed in relationship, walk free, talk carefully and gently, coaxingly, respectfully, and work with their full spiritual force, the casings of the outward matter, the twisting currents of their souls.

Apple green, a filigree of spearheaded lace, the tendrils curling and winding lie nodding earrings of silver netted and spread, the gauze of jade, washed green, and draped over the sturdy dark branches, a several headed tree, like a hydra, branching and living.

Ducks swimming across the water, like javelins, pendants or agents of the sun, dragging triangles of ripples behind them as they glide, as though raising a circus tent on the surface of the pond that is almost a lake.

Some leaves lit from behind an orange colour by the bathing light of the setting sun.

Geese flap their wings, raise their necks and like flying swans and pick their way across the gravel, clay, mud and chaldecony. Their bodies like clouds flecked t with heavily quilted, patched, patterned etched brown feathers, their wings black tipped.

The ICDS cooking house stands in-front of the house like a grim sailor looking out of the back door, staring out of a ruddy, sun blackened face, from under a sagging hat to keep out the sun from piercing his shaded eyes.

One who works in the ICDS center would later hail me on the road.

Bamboo poles cast of the whitened clay ground like railway tracks, the reflection of the mossy tree's branches, and leaves on the gently rippling lake, like a canvas of a tent cloth spread, the solar powered -electrical transmission wires snaking in zig zags across the rippling surface.

What is work to the powers that labour?

The turning of a wheel, the dragging of a spade through the dirt, the strengthening of one's arms and chest and shoulders and back, the glad lightening of the heart, the sturdiness of legs.

A flute in song, notes springing forth winged, from an instrument whittled from wood or fed by wheat and its flying locks over the fields, which one gleans, plants, weeds or trims.

"Do me a favour and don't try to describe work. Just do it."

What is living?

I think, it's sharing a cave with both gnostics and ignorant, learning from each-other. Both Interdependence and self-sufficiency, responsibility, rehearsing for membership in a household where each character is at once an eternal mystic and a shrewd, observant labourer.

And nationhood is belonging to one another, despite one's differences with one's neighbours; creative interaction, pulling one's burden diligently, charting out one's path like a nomad tells his position by consulting the map of the heavens with his hand, or a sailor with a compass and a sextant, apprenticeship or master workmanship over one's trade.

No less the ability to be a poet at the same time as an ironsmith who works with fire."

They passed the hut of a weaver soon enough.

Spinning, spinning like Rumpelstiltzkin span straw into gold-leaf, just as sun's rays turn themselves into straw, but a much better spinning, a woman heralding the weave, the lightning zig zag pattern of her saree, her shawl, her design, her template; standing at the loom and feeding it with hay coloured cotton, also, blue, indigo, cobalt, patterns, lavender, lupine, larkspur, wild cress. Sometimes she pulls a vermillion thread into the mix, crimson and dark like red brick.

The threads cross and waver, she pulls them tight and they sink into place, hug one another into a gathering of the garment's existence, a belonging in the fold of a shepherdess's veil, which she has bartered from the cotton and the linen farmers to have some lighter clothing in the summer.

And the light wanes, wanes on her work until she has to employ a candlestick or an oil lantern, for it to shine, flicker, glimmer on her work. Weaving until sunset, when the sun imbues a blood tinge on the cloth as it sinks into the sea. Does she dream of many ships to barter for the clothe she has made, to sell it in faroff lands, where it will be regarded as soft and fragrant and strange? Perhaps she dreams of other things. Her coffers will be filled by local buyers, customers who need and desire her wares far more immediately than any foreign buyer could. What would they know what to make of the two yellow suns shining on the surface of the weave, joined in the middle by a catamaran upon waves? What would they know of the significance?

Just now, resplendent on the banner she is weaving, is an ash coloured ascetic, with three lines smeared upon his froward brow, meditating in the valley of the mountain's shadow, his topknot rearing like the hood of a snake, casting a flickering light by the fire of his sacrifices of berries, gums and resins to the lord of the glacier, upon which reflect many hues of the rainbow: spitting sparks of light: carnation, aquamarine, jade and lemon, each with its fizz and with its particular calling energy and wavelength. And who survives in gelid temperatures, an iceman almost, although his brother and co-god the shepherd Gopala is greatly appeased by the affection of her village folk, their milling together in the market, in the field, one people, exuding and sharing in their human warmth. It is when they ring the bell at the door or window of their shop, or cast tinkling, clinking coins into the hands of the shopkeepers, that he is appeased, when they offer recompense for their existence, chimes, though charms and sacrifices move his brother, Shiva, the sage more.

The weaving woman cast a few words to her pigeons, or shall we say, wheedled them: dear birds, go inform my customers that they may take their wares, their robes are spun, woven, done.

As indeed the wedding was at hand, and the bride and groom waiting with their families for the priest and the procession.

The pigeons flew and cast their message over the houses that the bride stole upon her festooned bicycle, with the knowledge of her mother, to retrieve the wedding dress, the same dress her mother had worn at her own marriage, but which had had to be repaired for reason of severe moth-eating and thread-bareness, which in their busy days of horticulture and cooking, could not duly restore.

The weaver woman knows that art is a process, an act of creation and improvisation, by which an image a song, a poem or story is generated upon the spokes of the wheel of life, woven, but the mystical quality it embues stems not from the finished product, but the envisioning of work it represents, the labour of laying colour line upon colour line, brushstroke upon watery brushstroke, word upon word, phrase upon phrase, stanza upon stanza, and note upon note, and how a dwelling place emerges within the recesses of the artist's mind and heart and hands, that desired to see it in the first place.

A carpet spun is not just a carpet spun, but a meeting of one's mind with the phalanges and nerves of one's fingers, erects itself like a tepee rearing out of the work of its labouring folks, springs like a yurt with its various strings and tentpoles and reeds and skins and blankets and mats.

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When they were back in the camp, Sheila went up to Khala Sakina and said,

"Hello, Auntie. I am Sheila. I live in the cabin on the other side of the path, and graze goats from the village, and met Avan as I was exploring the tents. Please to meet you, and here's to the coming season in which we will sieve the grain together," said Sheila winking. 'Till the husks form rings around your eyes; hoops around your ears, and glitter on your shawls," she teased Avan's younger sister Azeeza.

"Avan will learn from your farming," said Sakineh, glad. "T'was not since the times of the grandfathers that our groups were cultivators."

"Pruning of grapes, grafting of apple branches, sowing of wheat, and watering of casuarina …"

'We will paint tattoos on the coats of our livestock with indigo dye and red ochre mandalas, as they low in the shed," said Avan, "So that they grow big and strong, with boldness and intelligence. Godwilling, I think the wool when it is shorn Sheila and I will card and spin, and she says she would like to aid in its colouring."

"You two come and have glasses of milk with us," said Khala Sakina kindly. "Where's Aref, tell him not to hover outside the tent, tell him to come and join us, it being cold."

"Khala Sakina, thank you for not ignoring me as these girls have been doing."

"No, watch and listen. I will teach them how to talk to a brother."

"Here's what I want written in the letter." Sheila scampered out of the tent to the doorway of her house, to fetch a piece of paper and a pen with ink, which she had purchased a month ago from the nearest town.

"Dearest brother Roustam," said Khala Sakina, bending to retrieve her weaving from the ground where she had left it when she went to tend the flame. "We are moving on since that day when you decided to make your fortune as a metal worker and tinkerer in Tabriz, in which we hope you buy lots of copper to mend mobile phones, wires and computer innards as well as iron to smelt and patch up broken pots and pans and trunks. We also hope the returns on your labour are enough to keep my brother's body and soul intact and together by God's grace.

Today, we have reached our winter camp in South Western provinces of Afghanistan, after a long travel from Tajikistan's shoehorn down to the inhospitable mountains of the Kunlun, whose weather makes travellers ragged, stealing their scarves and whipping up their hair, roasting, as you know, their cheeks with freeze, till they are like late crimsoned plums ripening in the sun.

All this makes us keenly understand the value of our knowledge of flocks and our labour grazing them, their coats which we shear and make shawls from, which saves us and salvages our livelihood, which is to look after them.

Avan and Pytor are growing as they should, although we still have not found a seasonal school to admit them, so that they can write my letters for me, and I am thinking of asking the writer of this letter if they can help them a bit with their alphabet." Her eyes winked at Sheila, before she completed, "Please write back soon, as you get the time, and tell us if you are ready for us to arrange your marriage and send your better half to you."

"Being your contemporary sister means to me, being able to see the darkness among the lights of the present, just as seeing darkness is not a passive absence of perception, but an active process of construction performed by the mind and optic nerves.

It is being able to reflect on the events of the present without fully getting swept up in them.

It is being able to draw a chronology of events from the times past up until the present moment, and being able to comment on their evolution and relevance and their interaction with one another to produce the current moment. It is personal and collective awareness of destiny, teleology, of goals and of their journeying.

There is a certain light, that of galaxies travelling away from us faster than the speed of light, that cannot be seen because their light is never able to reach us. Thus, what we perceive as the darkness of the heavens, is this light that though travelling towards us cannot reach our travelling and blinking eyes, and it is that which convinces me that your absence is indeed a presence, an abode of yours within our hearts, and ours within yours, as we journey through life, as experience chisels our souls to resemble even a shard of a mirror in the corner of the precincts of the Divine, while there is of course distance."

Sheila scanned the letter once to check for spelling errors. She read through it quickly, then said, "It's clear," and stroked the margin once, and kissed it. "Ink and paper," she said, "Are holy, and we revere it, for it carries the words of people's thoughts, which are gifts from the Almighty."

"Indeed," said Khala Sakineh. "You are a good and learned little girl to have written my letter." She bustled around the fire, casting sage and cumin into it, to make a fragrance rise from the curling flames, sending sparks careening out into the smokehole. "I only hope we can send our Avan and Pytor to the same school so that they may become proficient as well. I once went to school myself and learned to read and write, but you know my eyesight is not good, and find it difficult even to get my thoughts to the paper."

"They say carrots can improve the light in your eyes, and so I shall try buying a few in the town market, to see what good they can wreak on them," said Sheila gently.

"I shall pay you, of course," said Khala Sakina, thanking her warmly, happily. Her heart had warmed to Sheila ever since she had agreed to write for her. She may have been blind, but she was also proud and chipper. She stood up and began to search in the trunk for the leftover naan which she combined with a side of old cheese and spinach leaves and strawberries from the market of the previous village they had passed through, to give to the children.

The knitted cap of the bouncing girl, for Khala Sakina was little more than forty, had knitted a flouncing shawl, wrapped tight around her warm chest, crocheted, embroidered, with needles that had flown like embers, like sparks, that her eyes could just see, lighting up her fingers like columns of smoke or like chimney's nightly flares, like soot and coal, shooting curling glows.

"Listen to yourselves," she murmured to them, as she stirred. "Your own mind will tell you the answers. And then, because you have the capacity, look, look outwards at the skies and at the people, and you will know what is to be done."

The sparkling of the drifting casted snows, settling like waves on dunes on the hill's layered hives, frills, canyonic tiers, Mayan pyramids, shrines, whose steps head up to the sun, the washing stairs down to the river, carved, sharp, pointed, curving like ripples on a pond's surface, found around a lily flower or a bird of paradise lotus, a goose diving high upon wide, glassy skies, blue lagoons, washing oceans.

"Come, come," said Avan. "It's clothes washing time," when they had eaten. Sheila fetched her buckets and loaded them with the dirty clothes of the previous day and tripped down the road with Avan to go wash them in the stream across the copse of acacia trees.

"Make sure you don't trap fish in the veils," Sheila muttered. "For all fish are heading to their homes this season, to warmer waters, its cruel to hunt them when they are heading for spawning grounds, where they hatched from in their babyhood."

“Let us beat our clothes against the rocks justly and wear ourselves out that aways,” said Avan.

“Indeed, we shall be plumb tuckered out by the time this is finished,” Sheila completed.

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A hillwoman’s song

In the name of the Lord of the grasslands in the valley of the hills

My lover’s as black as the moonlit night,

His eyes are the sickles that shine through the gloom

His hair is as knotted as the turbulent waters,

His tongue is as red as the rose of the cracked pathways.

His arms are like sail boats’ wings, straining in the wind

His side is as hard as the deck-board of the ship,

And he sings to me, see, lady

Play like a flute plays airily

Straining my sails and making me swift.

Says the mountain Goddess:

“Let your limbs be lit by the feather’s brush,

Leavened by sunlight and toil,

Lifting buckets like trunks lift after suppressed by winds,

I sing of the one who stems the Ganges of nearby Hindustan burying it in his locks, the king of deities, the one with the topknot of the sage and long tresses of a wise kind youth, the lord of the bright cool moon risen in the night. The master and teacher of sages, the king of the Tempest and the Highland, the one who sequesters poison of the cobra in his blue throat, the one around whose topknot and neck are wrapped the coils of the serpent, the wielder of the trident that pierces the demons, and the one of the muscular body, refuge of all fires and heat, sculpted by the rigors of fasting and penance, the bringer of calm, who survives on grass and seeds from the field, the feeder of the swan and the stork, impressed upon the clay tablet of Harappa.

The lord of dance, in whose dance of destruction the world is redeemed, and the lord who is crowned with the sickle moon, who is of blue peacock hue, the lord of the oceanic waves, of the gems of amber and filigreed jewellery of silver which are its foam.

The one who wears a leopard skin as a cloth, who is the spouse of the mistress of justice, who is the judge and the Bestower of success, of technique and skill. It is to him that I pray, that he may bestow on me the boon of Siddha, to understand all tongues and to fashion my own implements.

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A well-ploughed field of standing rice plants, grass comprising of blades, some, a pale green, some, a bright, dazzling emerald, in the sun, standing in pools of stagnant water, reflecting the soupy blue of the sky and its scudding clouds. During sowing season people bend down to transplant little rice

plants from their nursery into the flooded soil, now that they are old enough to stand and thrive in the stagnant pools which reflect all who pass in a rippling, glassed, grey.
They will soon grow almost as fast as bamboo, reaching high up to the shoulders of a woman bearing sheaves of rice, grains encapsulated within a hard brown husk, which will later be winnowed with wind and sieve. They will find their way to the steel plate through purchase or barter, to be eaten with a soupy lentil dal, very watery because it is scarcely grown on the island at all.
On the sides of the field, the filed margins, gewa and baen trees line and dot it, with their complicated woody trunks and branches adorn the island, their leaves like spits or tongues of pale green flame on a burning bush, their pneumatophore needles emerging from the damp, smooth, marshy soil, as though they were jewellery in the ears of a monk or a maiden.

How sometimes the most brittle things, the wings of a bird, the edge of a nail, hold the charm of a snare, of a ring in the arched nostril of a girl. Young men eating together in good company, jovial, their pythonic arms braced against foaming mugs and hard stew, earnest, benign mischief in their eyes, his back and ache, tautened chords of fire waiting for the coolness of the night's hard ground.

And the diners are gone. Girl's feet caress the earth in a swivelling dance, a care to keep the jars of water from spilling over, an earthly nodding cadence, the billowing of the sea's rhythm, pulsing twin of the sharp clear contemplation of the awakened one.

Discipline thyself! Draw thy spirits up in the tautness of thy labouring sinew, for it is thy salvation

And swan-necked maidens, flamingoes of glee, carrying pans

To produce the poem of wakefulness,
Of dissent, of hard, ductile tenderness,
Deeper than water
Seven and twenty miles from shore
The speech of business, that is the speech of the soul
Upon occasion, keep awake!
She with the free mind, unfettered vision,
Caring but that she does right
When will the wounded heal? When will the anklet break?
When the wrists are encircled by moonlight
And the night steals the fever with these soft hands like flowing river water.

"Yes, I have a tongue, and a sharp one, too, one that can excavate and enlighten, both challenge and heal, question and inform, lead us to a true conversation, a communion, a mutual reconfiguration of our realities, as mine intertwines with yours."

Listen to the children's voices, for many of them know what is right, They will teach you what is good for your soul. They know the god of freedom that soars, walks and rests even in the mortal frame, and how to keep him there. They know that fear itself is to be feared, if it be not the fear of His punishment. They are singly bent on their goals, their parents care for them and how to match up to it, how to be loyal to their friends.

When you are hungry, you must retain him within you, when you are content, he has taken you to his bosom/ has taken you within him.

Did you know that food gives you knowledge, that immediately after your last morsel, you use the remains to write your gratitude that the food will be enough? Know, when he has given to you, and

when he has with-held, and for what reason, so that you may be called back to him when the time comes. Know when he calls, upon you to give, and be grateful when you are given, so that you may be content, and have wisdom and blessing therefrom.

And in the pigeon-shed, reaching into the vault of heaven, painted blue and hung with pearls and indigo, that's where we'll go.

"Making the treehouse: vines and grasses fringing the shutters and wringing in the doors." Hey, now, mister washer, slip your hand in mine, and thank you for your time, I see the sun behind the clouds. Hey, now mister washer, can you hear the sun shine? Its gold ring in your ear and it bounding like a lime/steaming chime/rhymes.

"And their ornaments are the bracelets of sunlight, and their necklaces the pendants of heaven/ the nets of stars. Their garments the magnetic haze of dust, polarised by the earth's lodestone. Aurora Borealis that shines with a thousand colours of violet, blue, new rose and glowing pine green, rippling as its axis turns it face to the bright light of the sun! Ruffling and blowing like a torrent of water, like a cascading waterfall, like the billowing hood of a rippling snake."
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A mud house with old, faded window shutters, painted a chipping light blue, protected by rusting grills. A strange combination: the most primitive materials, combined with a middle class one.

A barn in the back, made of the same kind of mud, with metal hoops attached to the inner walls, to which cattle are strung and tied with a fraying jute rope, both cows, bulls and nanny and billy and kid goats.

Around them grow an arena of banana trees, Sundori trees and grass; the Sundori leaves a bright, greenish brown, heart shaped corolla flares or like paper cards of Christmas strung on a string, or wood chips or hands clapping happily to a worship song in the tumbling wind. Their trunks and roots, curving and knotted, but slender, a rhinoceros or elephant mud-grey, camouflaging with the once rippling monsoon mud that now was hardened ground.

A goat had been tied to the stake a half hour too long and is calling out to be freed, but the owners of the goat are nowhere to be found. Perhaps they have gone to the market. I stoop and look at its tether; it is knotted by many tight and complicated knots and cannot be freed without a lot of effort. Just in case they are around I start talking to my mother loudly and calling out in a loud voice. Suddenly, a woman appears behind the shed, looking harried when I tell her the goat wants to be freed she looks harassed but nevertheless unbinds her anyway.

"Don't you want to send here with us so that she can be free and roam and gambol with the other goats and sheep?"

"Will I have to pay you for it?"

"No, since you have only one goat, we will make a concession. But her presence will add numbers to our herd."

"The ties of community are like that tether, when tended to, they release both parties, both beings."

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Chapter 2. A Geography Lesson.

The teacher, Mrs Merchant, whose first name was Zara, was saying: "Water seeks its own level, it is humble and is always falling. This means that it follows the contours of the land such that it travels downwards to the ocean as it flows. It does so in rivers, eroding rocks, soil, and vegetation as it goes, carrying a "traction" load of boulders, pebbles and silt or fertile "alluvial" it deposits on the

plains as it floods them. Its flow is fiercest in the mountains, while in the plains, it meanders in horse-shoe shapes, making oxbow lakes when one dip joins another and isolates itself from the main river. Water is a universal solvent; it dissolves the most substances of all solvents in the natural world."

"Racked and brackish, sea water can be used to dry cement, if left out in the open air; can be used for cooling dihorreal problems, if drunk, and imparts a fresh taste to any table," Samaira said.

"Children, you cannot drink seawater, it will dehydrate you."

Altaf put up his hand. "Ma'am Zara, water is the greatest solution," he said suddenly. "May I tell the class about the waters of zamzam?"

"Yes, you may," said Mrs. Merchant. "Go ahead and tell them. Children, do you know about the waters of zamzam?

"Well," he said, his face shining. "It's a fountain of healing, and my uncle brought home a jar of it last year and distributed it amongst the whole village."

"He did?" said Zara. Altaf nodded, smiling, waiting for a cue to continue. "Do tell us what it is?"

Hanifa said, "He's not sure how to explain it."

"I'm sure he can," said Zara, although Altaf looked unsure. "Let *her* explain it," he said.

"I was joking," said Hanifa. "You tell them."

"Well," said Altaf, gathering himself again. "It is said that when Abraham's son Ishmael fled for Egypt, that his mother Haajra searched for water for him to quench his thirst. The angel Gabriel lead her to a desert behind the Kaaba, and pierced the sand with his lance. There came an upsurge of water, a resurgent spring where there had been none before."

Hanifa added, "It is said that when one goes there one must take three breaths, drink one's fill to slake one's thirst, and say many duas while imbibing the water, and keep it with perfect faith and it will heal one of anything."

Samara looked doubtful. "I wish we had some for the children of Samarquand to heal them of their mine injuries. Ma'am, do you really believe this works?"

"Sometimes, Samara. Those mine injuries are something caused by machines, so sometimes we need modern medicine to heal such things. It is very sad that any children have to live in fear of the mines exploding where they walk. Remember always that equally important to your faith is your relationship your brothers and sisters, mother and father, khalas and kakas, whom you must help when they need it, and who will help you in return. Supporting them through good times and bad, through ups and downs, speaking courteously, doing the work you are given with cheer and readiness, is very important. Thank them when they do something for you.

Mahmood, an older student who was a shadow teacher for an autistic child, said: "The mines! Who put them there! It was the Russians trying to find strategic hold in the region of our nation, an ideological war supposedly, but really a war of expansionist military stakes, of control and power to influence the rest of the world from our land. Even if they did have noble intentions of nationalizing our economy of agriculture and mercantile trade, it would have been difficult for Afghanistan to transition to communism without ever having passed through the hands of industrial development. It could co-operativize its farmland and its mercantile economy, but it cannot pass through the hands of industrial development without peace and security from guns, bombs and mines."

"He is right," Zara agreed. She continued: "You, children must be torches of knowledge and innovation in this proud country, and also loyal, creative and compassionate to your fellow

countrymen. Build bridges across fortunes and frontiers, build networks of solidarity among tribes and villages. Let your homes be open to strangers and other groups, and study and play with their children.

And we should have taught in the West and in the North, in schools long ago, that the quest for knowledge is meant to help others, to offer something in exchange for your existence, rather than wealth and riches or power for yourself. If one makes a discovery that is of use, always use it for the benefit of others, not their detriment."

Zara sat by herself later, weeping, "Why should it be the children that give their parents succour in this land?"

***

Sobh. Morning. Zara said, "Morning and night are brought about by the turning of the earth, by its facing into the sun, the star around which it revolves."

Samara said: "Morning is when most of the day's work is done, like fetching water, washing clothes, cooking naan, and the azan will call at the crack of dawn and one hour after noon."

"Yes," said Zara. "Can anyone tell me what the sun, which gives us all light, is made of?"

"Oil!" said Altaf.

"Gold!" said Samara.

"Fire," said Farah.

"Close," said Zara. "It is made of a kind of fuel, not kindle-wood, but gas."

"Like they cook on in the cities?"

"Well, really," said Zara, "It's made of burning air, and we call that burning air or gas, plasma. There's so much of it, that it aggregates into itself, by a force called gravity, which is an attractional force that all matter has unto itself. The gases converge upon themselves and starts spinning in a ball.

"Zara, ma'am, that can't possibly be true," coaxed Samara. "The sun can't possibly be a star. It's far too big for that."

"That's because it's so close to us," Zara replied. "And once before the sun was born, there was a collection of dissipated gases which condensed and formed a spinning disc, where the center was like the yolk of an egg and became the sun. And its rings or the white matter of the egg, or the flat part of the disc, became the turning planets which revolved around the center, and the earth was one of them."

"The earth was one of them?" asked Samara.

"Yes," said Zara. "And one day, a stone slammed into the earth, which at that time was still a liquid, and a piece of it shot out and began to revolve around the earth, and the moon was born."

"How could the earth have been a liquid?" asked Altaf.

"It could have, and it was. It slowly cooled over millions and millions of years, and it is still cooling, and the surface has become rock. But its middle is still molten and its centre is very, very dense, and there are reactions going on in it that generate beau-coup heat because they are the splitting of nuclei of atoms."

Later in philosophy class, "Here's the catch, folks, everything exists in its ideal form, its concept and its purpose and its physical manifestation, in the intellect, which is the emanating force of God, in the guise of the forms. This ideal world is more real than the everyday world we live in. But what we have here is merely designed on those blueprints, copied after a fashion."

"Circles and circles of light, burning discs, wheels emerging form one's shoulders, circlets from one's outstretched hands. Circles emanate from different parts of you and one must engage with them to remain well."

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The emerald lake, with reflections of the short jacaranda tree infront of it, the brick footpath skirting round it …

'…Enact amendment to kisan (farmer) law to let them sell anywhere at any time, to any one…"

The goat among the cataracts, imbibing the power of the water, its legs splayed in a stance of power, while meanwhile the wind rushed under the road, emerging in a forceful cascade through the other-side. It was gazing up at the sky, with the sky's soaring clouds and across the fields of rice towards the forest paths. The scene was more than human; but supernatural, transcendent, awe-inspiring, hardly a romantic one in its sparseness, but a scene of belligerent power. A baby goat internalising the whorls, cataracts, turning rents of clouds, water, and field and sky the turning wheel of the universe.

The lake a pretty colour of dun brown, reflecting some green, the branches of the gewa skimming the surface not like a branch skimming ice or a spoon skimming cream, but the clear mirror of the rippling water reflected in distorted ripples.

Behind is a hibiscus plant, with earrings of red shoe-flower bursting and leaning to peer into the lake to see the treasure-house of the world reflected in the water.

Goats graze, gnawing grass with their teeth and wheedling it down their throats, nodding, salivating. Black goats with white or blue cotton thread tied around their necks, with horns just appearing around their eyes, on their foreheads, like crowns of flowers.

The only reason the little goat is free is because it doesn't eat yet. There is no need to tie it to a stake and moor it, preventing it from eating up all the grass.

The dhan, or rice fields spread out into the distance, with yellow furze on every plant, the maturing rice grains, transmission poles and wires stretching three layer thick across the fields, transporting solar electricity. And behind them, the jungle begins.

Infront of the lodge a slender trunked tree with white gnaw marks with blade like leaves on opposite sides of one another, making leafy fronds, but the tree is covered by ivy, whose tendrils ricocheting and curling off in every direction, the old rivers brown and intense bundles, sheets of strands, like a village maiden's hair fresh after washing and combing it, flowing down to the ground.

A temple song, throbbing, meandering, pulsating like a waterfall pouring down flower toothed flags of rocks down a chipped hewn wall, gushing, cascading into a foam filled hollow, to disappear underground as one of the many underground streams beneath the land, riddling it with waterways, dark, tunnelled, with many whispers of silent things unsaid, injustices swallowed, forgiven, and perhaps even forgotten.

Then the little goat, wrestling with loneliness, simple and creeping, gambolling, smiling. Taking the buffets of wind, breathing, with innocent fortitude. Standing alone in the corner of the hut, on four straggling legs. Staring out form the shed, its face shrouded by the sockets, the wall of the shed, and by the happiness that crept and leaped, from its radiant shrouded cheeks, its bemused yet determined mouth, we thought that it was a very cheerful and discerning character, one with curiosity and patience.

When we approach, it shies away. We speak to a woman, nearby, who is feeding cows, calves and bulls.

"This little goat is standing alone in the corner of the shed, just watching the rain. Why isn't it with its mother?

"No, it will stay alone for a little while," she said.

A small child, insistently asking its Baba to pick it up, and is pointing straight to the balcony. Oh, Baba, what is that?

"That is an older sister," is the reply.

A graceful gulmohur tree, its trunk like a fountain, with branches sprouting like springs, its fern frond like compound leaves like string pendants of an emerald, or stroking fingers or hands fluttering up and down a flutes' keys, or Bon Bibi's hands, bestowing graces upon those who seek them.

A flute song, plaintive and with drums, skirting and winding down the by-lanes of the windows that riddle the houses, down the alleyway near the dock of the village.

;The dog greets every goat that it comes across and the goats carefully observe it. The light shines upon our clothes hung on a line at the grilled window, looking out onto terraces of a half finished warehouse, coloured by fading, burned bricks, and green porous cement that is sandwiched between them.

And beyond, the trees like mystical fountains whirling and tilting in the breeze that stirs the stratosphere beyond which the sunlit clouds whirl and peep.

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At midday, in the sun from the smokehole of the small tent they had erected, Avan's eyes grew wide and she began to recite a rhyme: "A turquoise necklace, a stray bead; a building whirlwind, a singing bird, a questioning eye, laughing lips; but do you listen, or do you miss? Trucks bring cargo and cargo brings men, both of them precious; one can talk and the other, through nourishing, facilitates commerce. I have heard what they say of a night, of the price of onions and the price of rice, the meeting of eyes and hands over feed and coinage and what about the wrists that can afford to bend deeply because of their slenderness? Why is it that my heart to them is ever turning? Is it because they lead goats and I am one of them, and I try to show those goats where to graze and caper, and where to gambol but they bleat whenever they want? Or is it because their hands and mine meet over the samovar, feeding us both?" Avan thought a little and said : "I asked, what's in your mind? He said, beauty.

"And I said, because is in your mind beauty, for that reason is your face beautiful." Sheila said "And whence comes that beauty?" Avan said: "A life of discipline, work, charity and sacrifice. And whose face is he contemplating? The lord's light which is shining in the face of his lady, who comes to serve him his meal. She cooks sprightly in the kitchen, munching when hungry, and then back to her work. Know you what happens to me when I get hungry? I see rose upon rose collapsing and wilting in the wilderness, and new ones cropping up from the dirt soil, blooming and growing."

"There are men like yours in trucks in the place where we spend our summers, which is Qandahar round about. The word Qandahar means a ruin, it is on a plateau, a circlet of rock, gardened in front by swards of grass, curtained at its floor with a few scrubby, brush-like trees. Casting a shadow onto the surrounding mountain range; a Stonehenge, a castle of crags, brown, sunlit on the West, preceded by borders of banded rock and little scrubby plots of grass and mist, layers of rainbearing cloud, hanging low, in a sky of Kelly-green powder, a sheaf of a river's trail below.

Traders, mostly. When they disembark, there is bound to be a story about the comings and goings of produce to the market, the ways of the cattle bearers, the style of beards in the next township, or

the *macalm*, way the muezzin says the gathering *du'aa*, his inflections and intonations unique to the locality.

"Bless the girl who watches, for I am immeasurably indebted to her. I shall repay her with constant alertness, remembrance and hard labour. We will communicate with every morsel we earn and that the Lord puts into our mouths, so that when the day comes that we can speak one another's language we know each other already."

***

Magenta and evergreen pine, cobalt blue and iridescent gold, Aurora Borealis looms ahead like a gauzy curtain, magnetic polarised dust particles hanging in the northern night sky like a burning lantern.

Salty blue green water which when drunk, cures one of cancer, dihorrea and apathy. The breath of life, the flying iridescent phosphuorescent foam of the sea, the sea is a breathing creature; containing a leviathan and the salt water loving fishes, sea aneomones, crabs, lobsters, sharks and dolphins. Animals that rescue drowning swimmers through mammalian care and buoyed swimming manitee bodies.

The sea a nomadic space for ships, boats and dinghies. When cultivated spaces on land flourish, they smell sweet and ripe of golden wheat popping in the sun, and bright sheaves of corn and corn grass leaves rippling emerald in the wind under the brown blue sky and scattered strato whipped up, checquered patchwork clouds.

Wajma and Ashraf trudged up the muddy trail together, cheeks splattered with mud and rosy with cold, smiling in a slippery sort of manner. What have you folks been doing? Sheila asked them, aghast. "Mud baths," was the reply. "You'll have to wash your clothes yourselves, you know that," she chided. Have been lolling and lurking like pigs in the mud."

"No mother or auntie is going to do it for you," she said.

"Look, look, Sheila khala," they called, intending to incense or to gross her out. "There are worms wiggling and wriggling in the crooks of our elbows."

Sheila glanced with horror. 'Oh, you demons! Just look at yourselves! Even your hair is filthy."

"Oh dear, dear big sister Sheila," they said. "All in life is not about cleanliness, but about having fun too."

Yasinia appeared behind Sheila.

"You two are walking marshes," she marvelled.

"Indeed," said Sheila holding her nose. "They're walking peat bogs."

"Don't you be calling us names, Sheila Didi. Would you like a slather?"

Sheila screamed and ducked.

And they ran squealing and screaming all the way up the hill, Wajma's two braids flying like two tigers' bouncing tails. Sheila stood, hugging herself, watching them. "What Khala will say when she sees them is anybody's guess," she said.

"That's almost how you used to look daily when you came back from grazing the goats," said Yasinia. "So don't judge them. Just saying,'

"Did I really?" asks Sheila. "Yes, caked and slathered with dry mud, don't you know?" asked Ahmet, coming to stand with them as well. "Grass in your hair besides," he said.

"Well, that changes things, how I see them," she ruminated.

"Nothing like clearing the logs in your own eyes before you point to others," said Yasinia.

"And remember, whenever you point a finger in anyone else's direction," said Ahmet. "There are three fingers pointing back at you."

"If you want to be a good teacher, you must not let your patience be vanquished by these minor escapades." Yasinia said.

"I think it's my job as their half sister to give them a piece of my mind," Sheila said. "They're our children too, you know."

"Well, if you feel that way," said Yasinia slyly. "Although the role of a community member towards children is more like one of an indulgent auntie, I think."

Sheila looked arch. "I am a teacher," said Sheila. They walked home together, talking and nodding like bulrushes in the breeze all the way.

"The cooperative we made, let me tell you about it," Yasinia says, slowly when asked by the tourists, "I sell my milk to Philomena, and to Yusuf, and their families consisting of Wajma, Aashraf, Tariq, and Yusuf's consisting of Salman, Nazar Chand, and Hiren, a veritable bundle of strong peasant hands, that must consume food in order to work, drink it up with their morning rice like wild-cats lapping at a stream.

Philomena, standing at the door, her laughing mouth spouting scoldings. She had a silver and blackened ring in her sweet, cheeky and wrinkled nose, nostrils that arched and her eyelid's folds crinkled when she smiled, or laughed with her obsidian, crow black eyes, mahogany hair, and a guttering throat that was slender and shook like resplendant turtle-dove pigeons busy about finding twigs for a nest, collarbones like fluted geese's wings spread and flying. At home, she wove cloth of homespun cotton dyed an indigo and faded ostrich feathered, or like red ibis watercolour paint mixed in with white paint. She wore her veil pulled over her head and under her chin as she watched from her doorway, or opened the shed of her three goats to let them join the flock that Sheila would carry or lead up to the slanting grazing pastures.

Wajma, Ashraf and Tariq busied themselves about milking, cooking and washing, helping their mother, in the morning when your young goats had to feed and the nanny goats were bathed, before sending them with the rest of the herd for the day.

Philomena was Yasinia's friend. They shared buttermaking times some days, and they often took the little cakes of butter to market together, where one of them sat at the stall, neath the linen awning which they carried with them along with the tall poles which they strung across their backs and shoulders to protect them from the ravages of the sun and the damage it would do to your skin if you sat under the sun vending milk products like they did. Another half of the time, they trudged from door to neighbor's door, all up and down the hillside, to hawk the butter off to households that needed or wanted it; say to houses who had just had a young baby, and which needed to be massaged with the butter to make them grow and have their muscles grow facile and strong.

It often took a long time to coax, and wheedle anyone to buy their produce but they almost always sold it off on weeks that they had lived fast and tightly, and if they were not able to, consumed it themselves, on the hill path, lathering or spreading the butter onto their fresh naan with little wooden sticks and chewed it with relish, for it was often that they had eaten nothing since the previous evening.

Cows lowing, nudging, clickety clacking down the street. Nosing among the Rhododendrons. Chewing the cud.

A girl leads them, a fierce girl with a steel ringlet round her forearm, and a god-band round her bicep, a flimsy, black thread meant to remind her of Satguru at all times. She walks across the checquered floor, and she plucks leaves from the night jasmine bush at the side of the road, with a sickle in her hand to cut the grass on the side of the road where it grows in huge thickets of larkspur, long wheat and brambly, gnarly grass, and sweet-smelling patches of downy herbage, smelling of ash and rain and jute sacks wet in the storm, cast to the wayside after they have finished lining the cargo trucks' floor, which sequestered the procurement van's rice that customers had bought in panic buying.

She could not afford lockdown, as she was a herder and depended on being able to feed her flock as and when they were hungry. She was a shepherdess and their caretaker, their guardian. She was not starving. She was among the lucky ones, as her job was an essential service, so she was allowed to continue plying it.

She saw her friend, Raina, the daughter of a daily wager on a construction site, and the sister of her friend Rahim, run across the street, her hands cupped together infront of her, her father's staff across her shoulders, hoping to catch the rain, dew and sunlight that was the last vestige of the clean endowment before they would be shut in their houses for curfew. How she would feed her family in the future, she didn't know... They were going to leave the city that day, on one of the *shramik* (labourer's) trains or buses heading back to Andhra Pradesh.

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Sania was thinking of love and separation, and of how cold air mixes with warm, as her braid flew out behind her, streaming in flares of brown, black and sun-bleached platinum around her tree-brown limbs, wishing she could help her friends more and resolving to send them a pot of good buffalo milk for their afternoon meal that day for before they left, and that they would remember her by.

A mint-green wall, overgrown and encrusted with barnacles and moss, with a tin or corrugated iron roof, with a small window.

A girl, washing the floor, stands, her face in the window, her brown black hair blown by the sea breeze, cooling her neck and cheeks and eyebrows and forehead and ears, the locks of her hair blown backwards like a mermaids, her light blue salwar kameez damp with the humidity of the cool sea-wind, and the salty sea spray.

What to do when confronted with children who beg and pray for a living?

Send them straight to school, and the school should feed them, under the midday meal scheme programme. But what to do when schools are closed for some reason or the other? People should be trained to be self-sufficient, with less of an interdependent economy, perhaps.

Her younger brother was coming back from school and she was trying to have his food ready, but expected him to chip in anyway, later, by washing dishes.

"Sister, hi!" said Sandeep an 8 year old. "look at the sea-shells I've collected!" Samira was glad and greeted her younger brother. "Show me the shells first, and then take off your shoes!"

"Samira, Samira!" he said. "I also brought a bottleful of sea-water, o brine!"

"Why on earth did you do that?"

"In case the sea-shell- scallops get lonely, now that they've been taken away from the beach and the waves of the sea."

"Good thinking," she said.

It was time to bathe. With some of the plastic kegs they had filled from the water carrier, that came to their slum settlement every day to hawk water, the children all sprayed each-other.

The most Godly are the friendly people, also the hardworking people. But those who are godly for self-advantage, need to be kept in check by the Lord. The best among you are the ones who are best to their family members, and not hypocritical by sweet talking outsiders for flirting, but are loyal to the people whence they come.

"Let's not talk down to children and students all the time, lets' try to understand where they are coming from, stand in their shoes a little. Then we will be able to meet them at a mutually respectful middle ground. Not a truce, not a bivouac, but a collaboration, a combination of efforts that exacts the best from both sides.

An altar, a cross, a rose, a thorn, a leaf stem, a woman walking in a forest, barefoot, carrying firewood and bramble on her head.

She stops at a bamboo thicket to cut, harvest the top, which is resplendent with leaves, to put into her satchel, combine it with her load, fodder for her goats. Many kid-goats, following her, nibble at the grass and ferns perking up through the earth all around. But this fodder is sweet smelling, she has cut is for the cows at home.

The blue-green algae floating on the glassy surface of the water, reflecting light, rippled by the inner waves, from pebbles in the pond. Moss encrusted bark and polar trunks, scraped with the fine leaves of the bryophyte, opening their palms to the sun. The southward sides are exposed to a longer duration of sunlight during summer, have a greater thickness of moss, than the Northern sides. Travellers, bereft of compass, come to be able to tell their direction of journey and the nearness of their destination. Trees that grow their roots deep avoid toppling under storm surges.

Yellow light streams into the pond after rains, reflecting in their brown, muddy sloshing water, touching up the trunks with their powdery light, the leaves with a dim, wet sheen.

The gulmohur tree leaves, alternately aquamarine, mustardy green, amber, sways like fingers coaxing a tune, from a piano, or a sensitive hand feeling the grain of hair. Some of the jackfruit tree's older leaves are bursting brown, nestled among the straw coloured, faint green fronds of a date palm plant stirring in the evening breeze.

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Her strong brown body leapt and twisted as she worked. Her hair, in a braid, was straight and long as a donkey's tail. Her robes were woven of a dyed red, white and black wool, from burly, grey fleeced sheep.

She said, "This is how it is done in Yak country, where we have livestock f a mixed breed of bull and Yak, we call it a Dzo, and it carries our heavy loads, along with camels, as well as it ploughs our hearth when we harness it to a shovel and walk it through the fields, furrowing as it goes.

The light flames outside of the window, and the neighbouring garden's tree's thirst was quenched. Behind the neighbour's house, the sky was coloured a deep blue.

An apparition. The saint, thin, emaciated, his hair ragged, in dreadlocks hanging down his threadbare cassock, speaks.

He says: "Remember the days of youth, when joy and love poured out and forth like a fountain in your being, a spring in your chest. And thank the lord for what it was, and carry forwards that joy into the future by performing works of mercy and justice upon the earth.

All words, spoken in the light of truth, with a backbone of honesty and integrity, backed always by deeds. She had undertaken fasting. A solitary light suffused the wall opposite the grilled window,

shadows of roosting birds and flying played across it, light slipping and bouncing like a curtain hanging on a drying string. The universe of God only asks for you to dream collectivism fully, and others to will too, completing the picture.

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Stars, singing in a fountain's night

Pouring light and twinkling, smiling,

In orion's belt ringing as a sword

Piercing and searing her eyes so bright.

Purple flowers, stacked so high

Climbing mounting on the sky

Winding vines that creep and quiver,

Calling birds that shake and shiver.

A juddering roof, canvas flapping, a sail flipping and aloof, a catamaran gliding. A sledgehammer racketing, a spade slicing, seeds bubbling into shoots, stems lengthening, roots pulling.

The rain falls like plum petals, the willow hangs in sloping tresses; the pool ripples like fairy circles, the boat moves like trailing dresses.

Herons high stepping among waddling ducks, rubbing beaks with them and shivering feathers, clucking hens flying up to the rafters, wavering down, floating to the matchstick strewn floor.

Sheila recited: Gloaming fish eyes crossed and darted, clouding with seaweed and mussels, bright as the sun through the sea, a shadowy carp lurking in corals, the curls of an eel-snake's coils.

Hair like sparrows quickly dusting, round like snails and whorls and spider webs, falling down a mulberry bush, like a waterfall in spate, several cadged bluebirds cheeping, in their pilfered nest, hanging from the beak of a crow, determined, flapping, drifting to the cliff below.

Arms freckled like a speckled salmon, loitering once then surging through a stream, toiling at kneading bread, dragging a spade through rocky soil, hauling buckets from a well; The river swelling, boats float moored and bobbing coursing and when let go, oars thrusting, sails filling; the rocking vessel goes to and fro.

The girl planing wood shavings falling, to strew the ground below, her chisel smoothing, the table emerging, the wood kindling to a varnished glow.

Shiela ran to the nest and caught it in her hands, chicks and all. She admonished the crows. "Don't steal the baby bird's homes or the Lord will do the same to you!"

And she said to the baby bluebirds: "you, young creatures, must learn to defend yourselves. Bite the legs of the crows if they try to do anything to you."

***

The other women of the family scurry after, and the men, tall, wearing grey cloth and fez caps embroidered with jewel colours and shapes.

Veils swathe the women's heads and elegant figures, Khala Sakineh's nomadic nose-ring reaching from her widened nostril to her rosy jowled cheek, her nose like a sickle moon, a scimitar of fierce

beauty with a carved handle that was dug from the smiling wrinkles and lines, the frowns of her complicated brow[1].

"And when you walk," said she. "Make sure that these scenes etch memories into your hands and feet and phalanges, skin and sinew, nerve channels and innervating vessels.

So that your body becomes a text of the inscribed words telling of the enterprises of the hardworking men and women of this world, their dreams, their toil, their speech, their worship. Only then will your body be a repository of the Holy Quran and which fire cannot harm, nor the winds consume, nor worms destroy, nor rain blot out, like a rainbow's beams shining forth after the storm above the rescued arc, the Lord's covenant; always be available to counsel people, to aid in toil, and to decipher the obvious and hidden meanings of signs, events and scenes, feelings, building your intuition, so that you may discern the intentions of hearts."

***

"A ray of light upon my pillow of hay, and thus you woke me." Shiela, spinning wool standing, sitting weaving a galaxy of sheep's thread, strung with tears and morning dew, these stars glistening like diamonds in an evening sky or like a crown above Jehangir's forehead.

Arranging the strings to pull them taut into a fabric, daubing them into dye, weaving them in and out of the crossbands, then spreading the mat out onto the verandah to dry and to level, where sparrows pecked at the light flecked threads and hornets nested on the carpet as it matured.[2]

The muezzin's call, alighting upon the mountaintops like flame, ushering them all, whatever their birth, to wash, the lapping of the water from the fountain like stages in a dream, the sand flying before them like screens of carved lattice, the jasmine buds and twisting leaves of an intricately sculpted rickety window frame.

Yasinia scooped the water in her hand to try and pour it down her neck and it chilled her, froze her ligaments to the bone, made her shiver and shake, quiver and quake all from the crowned peak of her braided head to her long fingered toes.

Sheila dipped her cheeks in the crystal clear water of her palms, let it trickle down her neck and slide between her collarbones, lapped the water round her wrists and up to slather her elbows like a river wetting a balsam boat.

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[1] Khala Sekineh's nose and smile like the handle of a jug of milk. This mirrors the last episode where Sheila and Yasinia were milking goats and collecting it in jars to sell in the market. As we work, as we consume, so also is mirrored our work and our tastes in our appearances, though things are not always what they seem. Rather than being a jar of milk, it is a smiling and faithful and loving woman, an infinitely more valuable phenomenon, (all people are phenomenons) than one day or one meal's sustenance. This mirrors the ethos of Muslims who undertake a fast to understand better their connection with Allah, and to understand better what it feels like to be a poor person, so that they can identify with all people who have been created upon this earth, not just the rich and the fortunate.

Khala Sakineh talks of making a del-Quran, or 'book of the world', or a Quran of the heart and bloodvessels with one's body, through walking meditation and imbibing the surroundings and become one with them as one would breathe in air or smoke or perfume and imbibe the essence of it.

[2] Sheila spins wool standing, and what she weaves, catches dew and her tears at Avan's family's departure. Even as the carpet dries with the dye in which it has been daubed and soaked, the mat is useful for other creatures, as it is a plaything of sparrows and a hornet is able to build a nest on top of it, and Sheila does not shoo them away.

A pearly, opalate light, funneling down the plains was the afternoon to which Avan awoke. Her sandals had to be mended, her veil patched, her bodice fixed, and her skirts lengthened for the consummate journey they were soon to make.

She went to the skillet and fired a lump of old cheese for each of her younger sisters. With it she fried half of a flat bread loaf in butter for a crisp for them to eat it with. To them she said, remember me when I am married, that I fed you. And may you grow well.

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Chapter 3. Discoveries

"Come on Turin, it's time you learned a trade. "

"Is it, he's only four."

"Only four? Alright, go play with the dogs."

Turin walks forth, strides and grabs hold of one of the dog's ears. Gibrail spies him from the doorway of the tent.

"Wait for me! I shall wrestle those fang toothed creatures as well! I will play too."

"Be kind, be kind. Don't roughhouse the dogs, or they'll do the same to you."

"They are gentle creatures."

"Whom, the dogs or the boys?"

"The dogs."

"All the more reason to be fearful."

"Turin and Gibrail, play nicely."

"We hear, we hear," cried the boys, tumbling in the dust with the clawful dogs, wrestling as Jacob wrestles with the stranger. The dogs snarled partially out of mirth, and somewhat out of effort to keep up with the chase; and the boys are growling.

"Dear Wolf," Turin said. "You'll not eat me, will you?" he opened his mouth wide like a cavern and snarled. "You'll not eat my hand? Nor nibble on my fingers? But you'll eat *from* my hand? Indeed, I will take care of you if you will love my brothers and serve them, as we love and cherished you."."

The dog wagged its tail and leaped at Turin to lick his face. Turin embraced the dog, then let go, for the dog could not stand on its two legs. "Give me a stick," he said to Gibrail. Gibrail searched and found one on the ground. "Here," he said, giving the forked stick to his newly found brother. Turin flung the stick far and wide, across the wooded cluster to near the mosque. The dog whined. "Go, go," said Turin. "Prove to me that you are a pack animal, and I shall claim thee."

"You show true aim, and I will show him," said Gibrail, laughing, patting the top of the grey dog's head. "Come," he said and launched himself after the thrown off stick. The two creatures disappeared on the horizon beyond the copse, following close behind the tracks of the stream.

"Darn," said one of the men. "He's out of sight. Someone fetch him, or there will be a feud in the village."

"He'll return," said Gibrail confidently. "I'll go after him."

"Not you, silly elf. Another feud would be over you if you went. One of you men go," said Yasinia.

Altaf strode forth, saying, "I will find him."

“Do or die,” said Avan. “I’m going with him.”

“You stay behind, said Altaf. He was already halfway there.

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Her eyes were stars,

And her hijab a moss-covered garment

Her sandals were rivers

Her veins were streaming, trickling

And her neck the branches of a tree.

And she spoke mellow like the wind in chimes,

Guttering like a candle in the wind

Whispering like the breeze in grass

Singing like the koel in rain.

A crow, casting spells on the wire below

Snagging twigs for their nests and young

To build castles in rafters so strong in barns

Feeding worms and bread to their chicks.

A well, within which the crow’s reflection wavers.

The girl speaks to the crow, meandering,

Its talons on her fingers, holding it up to her eyes talking

Saying O, I knew not you came for me

But I thank you anyway for the bit of

Blue mirror I will sew onto my sister’s dress.

Moving the plough, heaving, harnessing her shoulder and shoving against it, till it bit the earth and sliced up a slough of dirt, uncapped the ground and dug a mug into it, and then she slithered out from under the plough and wrested it from the sticking mud so the hollow was left open and desolate.

She performed this fifty times in one row of the field, sowing as she went along, scattering from a bag of seeds she had slung around her shoulder and hanging round her waist.

She stopped occasionally and lifted the arms of her girdle to her brow to wipe it clean of the perspiration that had gathered in beads beneath her hairline. After she was done with each ploughing, she bent down and brushed dirt over the seeds in the hollow as though she were splashing or sprinkling holy water in anointment, or patting her hair smooth.

After every posse of seeds was in the earth, she said, inshallah, may my labour be recompensed, and breathed a long sigh, deep and full of breeze.

Yasinia said to Shiela: "We countryfolk know it's best not to eat unless thoroughly hungry. It's getting to be that time of day when the hunger pangs are gnawing: shall we wrap this up and proceed to taking food?

Yasinia kneaded the dough and widened it into an oblong, then took a knife and divided it into eighteen sections, as though it were a centipede or a caterpillar. "Now I shall flatten them into discs and roll them out with the pin. Shiela, you take care they don't burn as they puff up on the skillet.

A screeching sound, Sheila scraping its surface of all singed flour, sweeping it into a heap on the earthen floor. "Got to push this away or it will taint the *naan*.

"As the Christ says, when you prepare a feast, prepare it not for your brethren, nor for the rich, but for beggars and vagrants, for they have no way to recompense you. When you feed the forgotten, God will truly bless you in return. And when you visit a wedding, go not into the topmost room but into the bottommost one, that the host may ask you to join a higher, and the people therein seated will honour you for the asking, for having been invited upstairs."

Cliffs and plateaus rising like carved statues of sea-horses and dragons in sandstone, hewn of granite and chipping like slate, showing layers of sediment of black, brown and yellow, compressed layers of debris and sand and rifted saw-dust.

A high wind, blowing around the promontory, like a screeching yowling goblin, or a hawk, calling to its mate or warning its young of a storm it must weather in a faraway tree. A bat, screeching and sounding the back of a cave to gauge the distance.

The prophet said. "I never, or after my schooling, never wanted what they wanted, had climbed mountain peaks and hills they had never seen, nor would have deemed beautiful. My destiny as different from their destiny; I was called to the thing they would have abhorred because of the frugal life it necessitated. Not at all times, but some. Sometimes the lord calls a feast, sometime s a fast. That latter word is abhorrent to them. They are not acquainted with the phrase: "When you find contentment, poverty is wealth."

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When a mynah, a black, yellow, blue and green feathered bird, with black plumaged head and yellow beak, is building a nest in a high rise building, he carries the gold, straight straw twigs in his beak and on one floor below his nest, he pauses and perches, then he unfurls his hand-like wings, which are like peacock feather fans or scabbards with multiple knives attached in a circle, gives a series of high-pitched, desperate squeaks, and launches himself off the window sill to the rafter above, in a flurry of frightened and dutiful feathers.

Banana bread, rising on the stove, bubbling and baking. Grey-green furze and evergreen, growing into the windows from the trees outside. Brooms of gold, wielded in the idle of the stick, sloping backwards as the sweeper girl carries it into the moss-lined shed.

I thank the Lord for settling us in this new place and for the people who work here and live here's fellowship. You must be disciplined and steward what you have properly. Go out earlier in the morning. Don't backslide.

The good news is if you truly strive to be good, the Lord will accept you, because He is good. Mind over matter can be very effective. Whichever situation you're in if it's difficult, try to think beyond it, to transcend it. Then you will overcome.

The creeper (lata) like fluttering lace or a chain of ants shivering up the wall. You must use every single faculty you possess to unearth the truth through your writing, research and practice.

How beautiful! How beautiful! The sky was filled with light

Of a liquid water colour hue, the white and blue did fight

Like breakers on a beach with foam, a wedge of green and grey,

And filigreed bubbles bursting, joined them in the fray!

The spray of phosphorous gleamed in the early morning moonlight

The clouds of pearly hue above like horses and manes of sprites

The rays of sun did pierce the flocks that meandered through the hillside

Even though the road that ran, was trammelled by a traffic jam

If the drivers saw beyond the foggy glass windows they strove to squint through and see

Hills of driven, blown grass, flattened and scattered with dew drops free

Hewn with staircases that lead to monastic caves carved with scenes from the Buddha's life

They'd see and afternoon so blessed, one that aligned their limbs with it like an amazing

Globe of destiny; This cheesecake, who bestows it? The giver of song and life,

The lord God of hosts is his name; who bids us toil and fast, and watch

He'll wow us with his artistry!

I saw a flock of pigeons, feeding on a bowl of rice, near the mossy green and grey tank, near where the buckets are stacked that collect the building garbage, bright red, blue and jade, the bunch of twigs and worn out plywood along with the pieces of a brown and white tattered nylon industrial print sari, torn is swept into the corner; where the cleaning staff sit and talk after their morning work is done, where the jackfruit tree blows, rippling in the monsoon wind along with the night jasmine bushes nodding and greeting walkers, temple goers and those who like to sit in their midst in a few spare moments.

While they were flocking and romping and taking turns pecking at the rice, a squirrel ran with curiosity amongst them. One of the female pigeons spurned it, another charged at it, but the third observed it and keeping it in the watery reflective realm of her body-mind, cherished it and let it feed among the rice grains in the bowl, and the squirrel bloomed and loved the pigeon who had been kind to it.

And the male pigeon saw how beautiful was the play of friendliness and compassion among the pigeon and that little squirrel, and became her admirer and friend. The other pigeons flew away and the two were left, that they went together to roost beneath the building.

Write worlds, imagine and recall the beauties and the bounties, the rules and the strictures of the world that the Lord has made. Globes hanging next to each-other like globes of Chinese Lantern Flowers, like the stained-glass window interiors of snowflakes under the microscope, like seeing the universe in a grain of sand.

"Write!" the Lord says to me, and I write, out of the saddened world, the gladdened world, and all who are kin to me, the chattering neighbours communing at the temple.

Papaya trees with ten pointed, fractalkine, elephant ear leaves, lined with yellow veins and streaks among the emerald green. Dry whorls of branches alighted on the cement platform, canna plants, buckets of garbage and a metal cot with cotton wool and quilt beddings lying on it, wasted, cast out, getting wet in the rain, soggy and damp. How wasteful is that?

Chains of people, inter-linkages of communication, lines of talk and work; we call the nearby homeless/beggar shelter, and inform them of the stock. They are happy to accept, but provided we bring the goods to them on our own; so, we strap and wrap the bedding in a plastic sheet and put it into the car we drive, and head to the place to deliver the goods.

It is necessary to imagine and act, but also to meditate and sit quietly by ourselves a time, to sense the presence of the flows, the inexplicable charged nature of the universe, the divine.

Kinds of Relationship Categories.

Transactional Approach to relationship.: Emphasis on collaboration and cooperation at work. Oriented towards the present moment and achieving goals together with another person for the benefit of a third party. Eg. Teachers in a school discussing their lessons that they will teach and the intellectual progress of their students – a class they teach in common, different subjects.

Linear approach to relationship: people meet, and one of the people influences the other or vice versa, and this category does not emphasize the capacity for mutual change or growth. This approach is rooted in colonialism, in which colonists like the British, Spanish, and French viewed their colonies as needing to be civilised, contained, converted and guided towards a less "Barbarian" way of Being. Actually colonists held these beliefs as excuses for economic exploitation of the colonised people. The colonised entities already possessed their own culture, way of life, religion, and economic system, which had adapted and evolved to function and think and thrive in unique ecology, climate, and available resources of the region.

Eg. The wearing of hijabs (headscarves) of women belonging to the Islamic faith, actually evolved out of a universal protective headdress worn against the ravages of sandstorms worn by people of both genders, both men and women. Today, wearing of the headscarf is forbidden, or against the law in France, a country where many North African, Arabian and Central Asian immigrants much of whom are Muslims, have settled. This law was enacted on the grounds that everyone's dress at school or work should be secular and not mark one out against others, making one feel superior or inferior, but may in fact be simply a statement of individual or cultural difference, which in itself need not contain a value judgment, but merely a statement of different origins and path of evolution of spiritual character and vision.

The eyes, nose and respiratory tract needed to be protected from the desert winds otherwise they would be lined with sand if they did not wear a head and mouth covering, making breathing and survival difficult.

We need to watch where our values come from. Are we viewing our relationships as transactional, that is cooperative? Or are we viewing them as linear, that is are we operating in a colonial fashion, as benefactors and 'helpers" without out allowing feedback from the other party to influence us?

Gemeinschaft (rural 'we-ness" to Gelleschaft (individuals related to eachother through structures in the community. Rural or small communities function more informally: through word of mouth, through mutual informal aid exchanges of labour on respective farms or houses and whereas in the city, the factory employs people, the government keeps law and order in capitalist countries, and in communist countries provides housing, education, and healthcare as well as employment and remuneration.

Rurality(ies) or countrysides have more relationality among individuals not belonging to the same small family, cities emphasize the nuclear family and the work unit as sites of relationality.

African American community and culture, which survived through manual employment, emphasizes the feeling and knowing of the body, as well as that of instinct and intuition, as well as that of intellect and soul.

On the other hand, white culture, which may be considered hegemonic, emphasises the intellect and cerebral knowledge over body consciousness. Buddhism as a religion is conscious of the dichotomy or split between body and mental consciousness and tries to heal the split to bring about an end to suffering and unification through practices such as meditation, yogic asanas, and the reading of the holy suttas, or tellings of the Buddha which develop both body and mind and unify them.

The suttas develop a wholistic understanding of life, while the yogic asanas unify body and mind.

"I climbed to the top of the hill

Breathing hard was with me,

I gained my mind's clarity

Through pondering the wind blown grasses, green and manila brown

And the bubbling stream's source of pebbles among the snows

The glacial mountain peaks of scintillating brilliance and sharpness

Lit by a rainbow of morn, curving and glittering, clean and sheer."

There is an understanding among Buddhists also that one must walk on the shoulders of giants, ie, that one must use the knowledge of people and practitioners of Buddhism who have come before us, by reading the suttas or the sayings of the Buddha, who earned his enlightenment through many lifetimes of struggle, and progress by applying the suttas to our everyday life and meditation.

And, "on emptiness"

"In short, when the mind has fully severed,

The fetters of clinging to something

All the points are condensed therein."

Snow reflects all seven wavelengths of light, and is seen as bright white in colour. It represents purity, not the kind of purity of monochrome, but the purity that comes in a non-violent acceptance of the existence of myriad hues, of the presence of diversity..

In the Buddhist path, you never stop learning"

There may be changes of rank or of office, but the whole life and beyond present s teachings to imbibe.

In Bon-shamanism, every creature, stone and plant possess a soul which must be respected, revered and considered in every decision one makes. One can't simply decide to chop down a tree without considering its own soul and how many birds it shelters in its branches, and the shade it offers other animals and human beings. If I need firewood, then yes I can with thanks gather some of its fallen branches, thanking the tree for its generosity, but I can neither lop nor cut its branches from it, nor chop it down, if I am not to be revisited in anger by it and other forest spirits.

We see here that the relationship is transactional mutual and growing, everlasting.

Glittering cobwebs, filigreed tresses, like silver wrought,

Wound and twisted into earrings, hair pins and brooches

Arranged by the wind

Glissades of rushing streams silky, braiding over the stones

Reflecting the sun's dallying radiance

In their many tiny twisting turns and wheels and whirlpools

An intersecting stone, a melting oxbow arch

A combining lee, levied to join forces

And make their stream stronger.

Buttressed against the river, is a bridge

A bridge of banyan roots, plaited into a ramp,

Down which hawkers, school going children and other travellers walk,

Tramping high on a swinging road.

And the banyan tree grows carefully, generously, its figs for birds and seeds springing up in little

Tiny miniature banyans saplings everywhere, its leaves manufacturing glucose from the streaming

Filtered sunlight, storing it in its roots and its growing sap-making wood.

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"I run and hide," said Sheila. "I will find you," said Avan. She nestled in among the glistening rocks, glowing with lantern flies and phosphorus, covered with lichens and mosses and ferns, long and soft as grasses underfoot. Sheila crept to the back of the cave, prowling barefooted, travelling on her heels and on her hands, and crouched in the corner, gated by a wall of stalactites and stalagmites. Crystals shone studded in the walls, and she ran her hand along them, cautious as if she were running her hand along shards of broken glass.

It was sure taking Avan a long time to find her. She wiggled into the side behind a slab waiting for the hollow to admit her. Her foot brushed a rifle covered by a thin, woollen shawl and she got the fright of her life. "Haiya! Uncle Dawood says that guns are evil!" She moved slowly to the side towards the entrance, crawling on all fours towards the opening. Her toes pulled the cloth and she saw beneath a whole posse of guns, rifles, lying there cold and still, waiting to be strapped onto a soldier's chest, almost as if they were breathing.

Avan! She called You wouldn't believe what I found." Avan rushed over, with a game over? Look. No, really, what is it?" she asked.

A whole matchbox of ammunition, said Sheila. A bristling pile. What? Avan looked intrigued. Let's see," she said. Who do they belong to? She ran her hands over their handles. "Cyrillic. They're Russian! Kalaishnikovs! Left from the Russian invasion twenty years to be ahiding. Someone captured them and was, or is, hiding them in a cave. Just like the mines. No one can hardly ever seem to get rid of them, until they explode. She covered her face in fear and grief.

Well, what are we going to do with them? Asked Sheila. Destroy them?

For heaven's sake no, said Avan craftily. Perhaps my uncle Roustom can use them. He's a fighter in Iran and when we go back through the plateau, perhaps we could hand them over to him. "

"You couldn't cross the border carrying those," said Sheila. "True," Avan replied. "But why would your uncle Roustom need them? Sheila asked.

"We're trying to carve out a nation," Avan said. "Not a place where we're always falling through the cracks, second class citizens, having governments shoo and shunt us, hither and thither, but a place

where educated folk can stay and work fearlessly, and where us itinerants can freely roam and graze our livestock on land that belongs to our own people.

“Shall I tell you about what Uncle Dawood says happens to people who keep weapons?

“Shoot.”

“Hell.”

“Tell me more.”

“He says guns are the most cowardly weapons; when you shoot, you are afar, and when you duel, you give neither party a chance at life. Whereas when you fight with swords you enter into nearness with your opponent, and fencing, give him a chance at attacking you in return.”

“A man carrying a gun invites himself to be shot likewise, to lessen the threat.”

I have a hatred,’ said Sheila, of anything that can kill one man by the force of another. When I said I would tell you what my uncle Dawood says happens to people who use guns; it’s too wretched to convey with language, too terrible to go into words.

But we’re not free,” said Avan. “We’re not free to forsee that. It’s self determination or slavery, victimhood. Of course, the ideal would be to win our own land by dint of speeches and acts in parliament and they demand that parts of Azerbaijan, and Iraq be handed over to us as territory. They say that a man who can’t defend his own interests won’t defend anyone else. Not everybody is as hospitable as you are, speaking of which, I never thanked you for allowing us on your land, to graze our sheep with your goats side by side,” said Avan with tears in her eyes.

“We’re not hospitable,” Sheila contradicted her, putting her arm around Avan’s shaking shoulder. “It’s a trade partnership. And if friendship grows up in the meantime, that’s only as it was meant. Why don’t you stay here all year round, and help us with the farming? It’s so lonesome here, I suffer when there’s no one around. Forget how you were treated in other lands and set up a new home here! It is said that those who endure persecution in the world will receive honour and life in the next. Your uncle is brave for risking his life to set you free, but hadn’t you better tell him to save his own life by putting down his raillery, and coming to join the herding?”

“I do like your logic,” said Avan. “And I thank you for your invitation.”

“Why not await the lord in gardens of Eden, hereafter, wearing robes of emerald silk, drinking from fountains of Tasneem in goblets of silver and couches of velvet, watching the scrubbing brush burn as Moses saw the wonders, contemplating the mysteries of relations among all things, and the finality of belonging to the One?”

“Because that belonging,” said Avan, “Is one that must be fought for on earth, before it can be enjoyed in heaven. But for your sake, I’ll seek the kingdom of heaven first above all things, enduring all hardships in our midst, and I shall see whether through with our hard work, everything else will be added unto us also.”

“As I said, I will always be your friend. And the land that I live on, that is yours too. Is it not added then?”

So saying, the two girls laughed and scampered away. The matter was left for the time being. “Don’t fight fire with fire,” she said.

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Verily, Praise is the sword of Allah.

Praise is the solution.

Praise is medicine.

Better than hatred, better than pride, than envy, than enmity.

Everything to ashes and cinders in his name.

His forgiveness remains even unto tomorrow, and the next day and the next, when the riven brothers are united in the name of Allah.

The eye, the vision of Mohammad is the way of Allah's instruction,

But possession of that belongs to none but him.

In every flower, in every fruit, in every city, waits the Divine Eye, the Apple of His Eye.

And in each and all these let there be the praise and allegiance to none but Him.

Watching, surveying, each living thing is enervated by none but him.

They must choose their original nature, their ordained purpose, their destiny, or be cast to hell and be burnt to cinders.

India insisting on Kashmir being a part of it without special status, when the Kashmiris no longer wish to be, is like a guy who has neither shame nor dignity nor selfhood of his own, insisting that the girl continue to be his girlfriend when she doesn't want to.

Indian soldiers in that state have killed and maimed innumerable Kashmiris youth. And they still think the regional mindset should wish to be a part of India that treated them with such cruelty.

"Article 370 gave Jammu and Kashmir its own constitution and decision-making rights for all matters barring defence, communications and foreign affairs. Its removal ends special status for Kashmir, which was key to its accession to India in 1947."

(Kashmir Special Status under Article 370 Ends "at Once": 10 points, NDTV, August 6th, 2019).,

You can't just stand by and watch while stuff happens. Jammu and Kashmir was, as of yesterday, sundered from being a state with special status, which gave it erstwhile decision making autonomy from the Indian government, except in the arena of defence. The fact that it is a Muslim Majority region, the only state in India that is so, informed the decision of its masses in 1947 independence at which time they joined India's Union on the condition that they would have decision making autonomy in all areas except national defence. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, has now been scrapped, meaning that the region now has to submit to all provisions the center deigns to make for it, in terms of education, economy, religion as well as defence. We are already aware of how the Indian Army's presence in Kashmir, a neighbour of Pakistan, has resulted in the capture and murder of countless young men, the harassment of thousands of school going, college going girls, housewives and working women, and the fear of police raids and confiscation of property by the ruling government apparatuses. But it seems the Indian Government is not yet satisfied. For the past ten days, Internet wifi, phone connections, television cables in the region have all been shut off so as to render the victims of the army's possible acts of violence voiceless, however numerous and hideous the human right violations they may be. The meeting of two or more persons in the territory in public places has been forbidden, so collective resistance, understanding and political decision making as a group are now no longer possible despite the crying need for organisation and decision-making from within. Chief minister Omar Abdulla and Cabinet Minister Mehbooba Mufti have both been put under house arrest and hence are apparently no longer considered for even representing the people of Kashmir in dialogue with the Central Indian Government.

Unfortunately, the entire valley is not yet fully aware of what has occurred politically, because they are unconnected to the internet, news channels and newspapers. Hence, even if an order was imposed on them from without, there would be no way for them to know this and follow it, making them rife for arrest and police brutality when they do not comply. There is also no telling what the central government might do to the people now that whatever accountability it had to respond to, in the form of connectivity and communication in the valley, has been scrapped. Every citizen who cares about human rights and equality in our nation, as well as the faculty of every social science and humanities university in the country, if not the administration, involved in so many welfare projects in the Subcontinent, also has a duty to raise its voice against this.

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"Everyone who has ever felt disrespected, demonized, misunderstood. Everyone who has in a way been abandoned or betrayed. I shall gather them up as a goose gathers up her babbling chirruping frightened babies and warms them under her rustling bustling feathers, like dams gates lifting, opening, or wingtips rising to catch flight, feathers grazing the air.

I will give them voice, eloquence, that people will not be able to deny or shut their ears against, but shall listen spellbound. I will give them skills and direction and respect, and I will make them rulers over those who have oppressed them. I will make their trades grow their stocks multiply, their cattle-sheds burst with the cackling of chickens and the mooing and lowing of butting bulls and nudging cows.

I will not give them meat in their bowls twice every seven days, but I shall give them milk every day, spilling into their pails, thick and beige and creamy, but what they do not drink, they will sell, and barter eggs as well in return for bean porridges and lentils and millets and sown sprigs of sour olives and strewn, sprouting oats.

They will say, we have not cursed you, but Allah knows that those who curse, and those who stop themselves from cursing have been terribly hurt within. And he is their avenger and steadier, and he does not spare those who have hurt them, unless they repent and gain forgiveness.

I will let them patch their rooves with tin and iron and clay shingles and canvas sheets and tar and plastic bolts. I will give them wood chips to block the chinks in the corners of their walls that let in the rain and wind, whistling, I shall give them floors of smooth cow-dung and swept dirt scattered with sweetgrass, clover leaves, bursting blossoms.

In which shall I pour divine fragrances. Frankincense, myrrh, jasmine, rose, cumin, chrysanthemum, in tornadoes of smoke, rising against the nostrils and strong like the musk of a deer in a forest clearing casting waves of beauty and rapture of which the fairies and the djinn can but sing.

Those who are grateful for what they see, feel and hear, smell, touch and eat, as well as what comes to their mouths to say, those men and women shall survive the days of hunger and see the light. But those who are dissatisfied, or ashamed, or attempt to throw away what they already have been given in return for something they think is better, they shall fall prey to eagles and vultures, shall slip in the muddy rains, bitten by snakes and nevermore will see the morning. Or will become thieves and robbers and bandits themselves casting their souls into the pit like poor Daniel was cast to the lions, or Joseph's cloak was thrown into the well to fool his father that his son had been killed. And like these heroes of the scriptures, these souls will soon find repentance and the trails of forgiveness, for they knowing now that they listened to the empty promises of crafty frauds, charlatans, quacks and touts, and fed the greed of the rulers, they will crawl up to the house of their Father, and he will give them solace.

Remember, I am not a God of luxury. I expect men and women to work hard to cling to the ladder from rung to rung, and rip and tear their sinews with effort, as a snake tears its moultings, to rise. It is in transformation that life is lived, by consciously acting upon the material one is given to improve

one's lot. But some people do not understand this. They try to sell what they have to someone poorer and more foolish, and then to buy cheaply something dear. But doing this, they will never get enough, nor will it satisfy them if they did. Because they must learn first to work with the destiny they are given, battle and spar with the djinns in your own hut, your mosque and your tent, your own skull, before you can enjoy the clean fresh air of the outside. When you are mature, you will understand."

"Take what Uncle Mahmood says with a pinch of salt. Sometimes leaving the house is the best remedy for straightening up the whorl and tangle of hair and nests that have accumulated inside."

"Walking under the blue sky on an empty stomach welds together the nerves of the brain.'

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Doors opening, doors closing, swinging on their hinges, doors of darkness, doors of light. Doors of webs and doors of blight. Blasting barnacles and fungi and lichen, ornamented by the mould growing through the carving, the gaps between buds and leaves, twigs and fruits, branches and flowers, petals, stamens and pistils. Slender tomato plants, propped up by their bamboo stems of sticks, roots sunk under inches of water, with which grass is wilting and stray blades, starry flowers, sprouts splayed, a pattern eaten in the healthy leaves, like the chambers in a lung, the filaments of a gosling's down, or curving dashing spinach leaves, clutching and choking pebbles and roots of ragweed.

It has been so long since we last saw you!" Sheila exclaimed to Ahmet: "What on earth have you been doing?" Blinking at the assault of the near insult, which insinuated that he had not been at his business, Ahmet replied: "I have been peddling apples and carpets in the city, he said. "But tell us about your days there?"

"Well, we woke at dawn in our inn room and burned bakhoor for an auspicious outing, then we folded our carpets which we had been looking at and feeling with our palms through the night we wrapped them like handkerchiefs one on top of another, like palm fronds folded un-bloomed yet in the branch, and bundled them into two separate sheets; Ali my uncle took one bundle and I the other, strapped them to our backs and we set out walking, roaming through the streets, calling: "Upholstery! Carpets for sale, well priced and comely!"

And a few people beckoned to us form the shade of their homes, though others at the bazaar stopped us in the streets, wanting to witness our stock being unfolded."

"We remember what we have made, orchid rimmed cloths with market scenes, doves alighting on a verandah in the morning light, a mosque made of marble and lattice worked screens, rider with his horse in a copse, women threshing grain and plying boats with bamboo on the Oxus and the Euphrates. Plunging cliffs along the Amu Darya, gathering foam, crumbling rocks, capsizing boats. A steerer leading, rowing swift, his arms and torso charging, drift. Villages of goat pens, crumbling walls, fences hanging broken, stalls; horses trotting riders taming, held like rifles flying far.

"Women, veiled and tiarad, tending doves, scattering grain around the paths surrounding a pietra durad shrine, others sat at market vending apples, pears, chickens and goats. Their eyes were chocolate brown and warm, their smiles welcoming and enchanting. Some were preparing the place of worship by washing its rugs and hanging them out to dry in the open air, cleaning its faucets for pilgrims and regular folk to wash in it, and dusting its carved windows with cotton rags hinged on wooden sticks.

A man was bargaining with a merchant over eggs and an albeit thrifty housewife was haggling money into the hand of another vendor and a shop assistant was arranging tomatoes upon his cart table.

"A yellow lantern tree, a *mynah*, a sunbird flying, a marigold, a warm, buzzing bee, an aster winging on the wind and crying, juniper branches with berries casting forth their fragrance on air ...

"We need a carpenter to mend the loom, as it has cracked, from side to side, and no longer will the cotton hide, nor will spread the woof and wool, but will tangle and will warp."[3]

"A rabbit, shivering in the bushes, white and brown fur, a pink nose. Raspberries gleaming, casting fragrance on the wind. A black bear, lumbering with trout in his jaws, swallowing with jerks as the meat is chewed into a pulp which he swill around in his jaws, about to nose among the bushes, keeping his honey in a secret place, dipping his claws in a buzzing hive, crunching upon the honeycomb when the bees have left, swiping arcs into the air with his furry paws.

A racoon, a doe and a squirrel lining up on the river's banks, drinking deeply. A stag's reflection in the sunny pool, a snarl of antlers to be a hornet's nest."

Yasinia held the scarf alone at one end and Aref and Ayesha held it at the other, and made circles round her, chanting: sparrows, sparrows, doves and sparrows, come eat, gather what we scatter, come feed upon the slopes.

Sheila twisted one of the scarves into a rope and gave it to Ayesha to skip with. She bent down with a broken piece of chalk and drew squares on the scudding ground. Each drawn field had an Arabic numeral, and she said to Ayesha, skip, skip in each of these tiles the same number o'times you see a numeral in the square and pick up the stone or chalk in whichever quadrant it is fallen, and throw it back over your shoulder.

"We stood from 10 to noon at the stall peddling our apples; you remember harvesting them. Many people passed to and fro, to work, and to market, and many stopped for a refreshment of the fruit. And we stood there three days, until our load was finished. And we were lighter for it, though the coinage we earned was but little of the apple's worth. Our pockets were heavy with air, and threadbare plunged in sunlight, aired in the foam of docks, and bathed in the scent of juniper and pine and our shirts were ironed with the wind, and our pantaloons billowing therein. Our clogs or sandals were dusty, glassy with grit and made marks like poetry writing in the sand.

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Nuristani is to be neat; to fold our apron corners into our sleeves and our collars under our chins and our sashes tied into bows behind our bodices, our pantaloons rolled gladly into our bootlegs.

Our flowery work-shirts ironed and tucked into our dungarees and skirts, our hair tucked beneath our caps or our veils, like straw bales wrapped in satin or submerged under gushing water.

Some of us have hair like hay, others have hair like slate, ebony or red roan ponies or even rainclouds and chalky remnants of the chuckling stream. Some of us have eyes like the far yonder blue ocean with the sunlight shining through it, still others, green marble, others black as magpie robins or brown as molasses and eclairs, others still like floating grey skies over reflective lakes.

Some of us have skin that's rosy and scrubbed, others that's black and hard, wrinkled by the relentless sun. We are all ages, all times, all races gathered within one horde, bursting and crinkling at the seams, and, we are all tidy.

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"You, I was waiting for you atop the mountain, and I cried out it was too lonely for me to continue. I was almost sure this mountain was barren. Traipse, girl, into the hut. It's too cold for us and too late in the day to sit chattering and yammering on a stone wall with grass blades and frost pricking our

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soles. Come, come, help me pen these sheep in the shelter and then we shall be ensconced well in the barn or cairn which we call our home, with a good vegetable stew in our stomachs and goat's salty cheese and sound milk.

Goats to be milked, pails to be carried to the market, ground to be cleared and sown, looms to be laid and threads to be woven, spools to be cut, wool to be dyed and spun, sheep to be sheared and oxen to be moored and led, and then there's my sorcery work; the casting out of demons from afflicted souls, and their healing by mellifluous chanting and the careful choice of herbal medicines.

A laughing verse, a chuckling rhyme,

A sparkling leaf of sorrel and thyme

A whirlwind of dandelions,.

A posse of clovers, a garland of violets

A wreath of oleander; these six ingredients, stirred with the breath of two vestals, bubbling up in a cauldron and to be drunk off when cool, and applied with rags to the fevered skin.

Jamila, tossing in a fitful sleep, that Yasinia had put her in with her chanting, and now she commanded in the names of the saints, for the demon to leave her. Yasinia put her hand on the forehead of the sleeping girl, sucked the breath from her mouth, and then breathed over her nostrils, chafing the cheeks of Jamila with the eagle spread of her hands, the feathers of her fingers. She steadied her shoulders and brought her to a sitting, said, she needs to be set free.

Jamila got up and ran through the doorway and her face crinkled in the sun. She whirled about for joy and her skirts flew outwards like a dervish's garments, and she began to run and leap like a deer, tripping over the sharp stones and drops like an ibex, bobbing up and down like an antelope.

Do not weigh her down with cares, said Yasinia. She is not yet ready to wear a veil. Let her be free in the open winds, and once weathered by them, and her eyes and soul brightened by the glowing sands, then hide that leather in the mantle of a chaderi, to protect her from their ravaging.

And let all look upon her, for many will be refreshed with the sight.

Yasinia was feeding the goats into the pen, Alyona, Altaf, a brown and white speckled one, Imtiaz, a black goat with a clipped ear, Farheen, a nanny goat that was brown all over, Apsara, a raggedy hooved, pure black goat, and Shaheena, off-white, decayed tooth coloured animal that was always frolicking.

They rustled and scrampled and jostled and gambolled into the makeshift pen that Yasinia had just constructed, and once in, some of them bent their knees dutifully, and curtseyed off to sleep. Yasinia knew that however high a price was offered to her, she would never sell them for their trust gave her a power that could deliver them from wolves into safer pastures or grazing lands.

She breathed kisses onto the wind that they might reach Ahmet. In them she poured the sweetness of honey and raisins, the pungence of lemons and amlas and oranges, and the trustworthiness of almonds.

In them she set sail a paper boat upon the storm, rivulets, saying come back, but not too soon, not until you have seen the sapphire of the sky and whirled underneath its circling undulating tent, and seen the horses thundering past on marshy wetlands, seen their fierceness emerging like sparks form their flinty nostrils, until you have ridden it for a fare and hugged its throat to your chest, waded in among tall grasses, and the tall reeds and seen the faces of your countrymen wavering in the waning light, until your heel has left its mark upon the mountain snows do not return, until you have seen the black tipped wings of the flying hawk above you, but carry these treasures with you when you do or you will never be satisfied with what we cook for you.

Horses thundering, ponies running, trotting, their fetlocks and manes flying, their nostrils whinnying, their lips fleeting from their fluted teeth. Mares grazing, foals sucking, stallions leaping, shadowing, gazing.

Their riders wrapped muslin round their shoulders, wiping them down, brushing their fur with combs, washing them with pails of water, feeding them with grass and with apples.

***

A spinning circus, a lapis lazuli dome

A web of milling spiders, the lattice of vineyards

The minarets reflected in lakes, the screeling of pigeons

The peacock feather alighting, the pietra dura of thrones

Remember Rabia al adawiyya who fed the crows

Who fasted until they picked an onion out of the kitchen

And then said, if the garnishing is gone, then even is the dish

She fasted yet, till a pancake from their beak spilled

Rabia and her serving maid were difficult

No sophistry could touch their flying carpet tails

"She was a slave, and that was why she was so leery of other people, why she kept such a strong faith in her Protector. She never married, which is why I identify with her whenever Najam isn't around."

"See that you keep going to the school. Learning to write is so important, I can see; you learn to quantify things, to own them."

"But what about learning verbally, and becoming what you hear? I would fain turn myself into a wind, so that I could follow Aurangzeb wherever he went, and to be the sun that could shine on his face the full length of the day, and to be the sand caressed by his sandals."

"I will tell you," said Yasinia. "You own yourself, it is your choice whom you give yourself to. Thus, also, if you can write, you can own wind, sky, earth, trees, vines. And has not Allah enjoined it on us to read, to decipher in the midst of creation his cunning?

"And establish justice. If you can write, you can weight things against one another, compare them, and decipher his codes. You may inscribe poetry that tells of his glory and through sciences find the depth of his mysteries so that generations to come can learn and benefit medically, intellectually. You can read his holy book and thus you will be protected from harm if you have the sacred verses within you, as it is so potent a resurgent spring that fire cannot harm it.

"Thus, I say, the girls will go to school and they must."

So saying, Yasinia took off her veil and her coat, wiped her hands with a soiled brown handkerchief and went to the mirror to do the kohl on her eyes. The arches of her feet made dents on the dirt floor and her tunic brushed the dust in her wake. At the same time she put herbal tea on the boil, an aromatic and soupy concoction that they were to have for supper.

The light shone from the latticed windows and glowed orange among the drapes. It was the colour of flamingos, of tangerines in baskets and bowls.

***

"Mists of heaven, melons and rinds,

Curling through a forest of redwood pines,

Smoky, fog-like cool and dewy

Like incense blowing through a woods' lungs.

On the mountain side, a carved drum,

Beating with the rhythm of a river's strum

By glaciers hewn, no longer ice but water,

Trickling through in threaded streams,

Feeding ferns and forgotten lilies.

Shining beneath the sun when the day is here,

Beneath the inky sky and stars at night,

Ever chattering, ever calling like ringing bells,

In slipping flight, a silver thread.

Spun through the fingers, pulled and sped,

A bobbin, robbin, washing its ruffling feathers

Tinkling with stones wet by the cascade,

To build a cairn, on the banks of the altar for weathervanes.

Or for altars for worship.

Perhaps its nest it will combine too,

With many a twig, and drying leaf,

In the deep, where chick babies sleep,

The yellow feathers wet with dew.

And ever, ever spinning gosling feathers

Flying like windmills up to the sky,

In whorls and wheels of wings and arching necks,

Webbed feet tucked in oh so spry, beaks neat and honking.

At sixteen, Sheila has grown into a spirited, dusky girl with brown hair and beetle brush eyebrows joined at the middle of her forehead. She is the first literate person in her adoptive family, and she teaches her older sister and brother of the lessons she learns in school. She studies geography, to understand the lay of the land and the best pastures for her flock, where mountains are not unstable and do not crumble and where the sweet clover grows and the milk augmenting herb for her nanny goats. Checking for underground caves and rivulets, that undermine the mountains and make them more perilous to climb, she also chooses and stewards the pastures which she has chosen for the long term sustenance of her flock, by looking for places overgrown with short scrubby trees that have a sufficient turnover of fallen leaves to ensure a steady supply of nutrients, spread the guano from the

shed into the pasture to enrich it. Sheila tries not to go too high or too steep to ensure that the soil has sufficient depth for rooting and drainage, keeping her eyes open for plant diseases and blights, which might be transferred to her flock. She loves attending Mrs. Merchants' class where she helps the younger students with their Balochi and Persian literature lessons and geography. She proudly shows friends of her age, how in the summer, her skin is browned a dark caramel and in the sun, or takes on a fierce, hard, intense tint, like brown shade of sequoia wood, from the Gujjar blood in her that composed half her lineage.

Her older foster sister Yasinia, works in the house and in the fields in the day, preparing food when it is available, rolling naan and roasting it in the common chullah, sowing seeds on their small farm, weeding, tending. She is taller, dark as Sheila, beautiful, of a rather slate colour, and with long hair assembled into a French braid with branching streams growing from the top of her head, down her back.

I like it very well, Sheila had said when Yasinia recited her own poem about the harsh crags around which Sheila had to wend to steer her goats.

"And I shall write it down, with credit to you," she said.

"Oh, you will?" asked Yasinia thrilled and transported.

"Of course!"

"Write this down, then, and I shall tell you, and many a time more."

"The many crags of mountains and sweet curling mouths of cliffs, laughing in jest at my climbing, wind, oh, spreading my veil like the pack horses mane on the breeze. Oh hillside, I shall feed on thee and be satisfied."

"Wah!"

"Hast thou written it?"

"Ay, that I have."

"Here's a burr, there's a burr. All in your hair and shirt and skirt. I'll be a blurr picking them out! Where have you been to get so prickly?" Although not educated in school, Yasinia was known for her wit and talent with words.

"Among the t'orn bushes and the brambles, the wild grapes and the berries. Hence have I brought the blackthorn, to kindle our hearth and to cook the flatbread."

"The wind is sure wailing outside, whistling a storm, making the rain a stream! We had better stop up and sop up, the threshold of the house with clothes and vessels to prevent the ingress of water into our quarters."

The two girls busied themselves with the stopping of the doors and windows, and then sat quietly near the fire while their lunch cooked upon it, deftly rolling out the flour and pulling apart the potatoes, peeling them and chopping them and adding the shavings to a pot of boiling water and cabbage.

"Is it not sore, that we eulogise the elements in our poems and then they rail at us, thus?"

"Indeed," said Sheila. "We have emboldened the weather, and now it will not listen, but will shout."

"T'was an invocation, I say. 'T'was a canto, a chant of calling it out of its sleep."

There came a rattling at the door.

"Thou'lt not! Not harm these dogs. Let us catch us a cat! Or a weasel! Shall we hound them? Nay, let's ride the dogsled, we'll not harness them to it, but pull it ourselves, with the strength of our calves."

"Wait! Wait!" said Avan. "We must tie the bells round the handles of your sled to keep you boys found.

"Indeed, sister," said Turin impatiently. Avan, with a blue and yellow scarf tying round her head bent down and fastened the string of bells round the handles of the sled, so that they would chime when sliding through the snow.

"Dear Snowmaiden," said Turin to the snow statue. "Grant me the boon that animals shall be drawn to me when I wish it, that we may play together."

"You are a scurrying gopher,

With a head like a rat,

Poking your head out of the hidey hole at night.

Eyes shining like mischievous sparks.

You are like of a hedgehog or a little porcupine

Furry like a fox, and quick as lightning.

Gopher, come play hockey with me!

Steer in and out of your tunnels,

Chasing this agile human being,

--Come, I invoke you--

Laughing at his big, sturdy legs

Which are in fact spindly like sticks!

Chase your friend in and out of the woods

Like sparrow chases the younglings out of the nest

To make them fly!

Come grind the dirt into glass with your molars,

Make mud pies and cakes and flatbread

Stud them with red seeds

And roll the leaves into kebab cutlets with sticks

Fastened into boats to set sail on the river

And don't blame me for not underestimating your intelligence nor your love."

Avan replied: "Four things on earth are small,

Yet they are extremely wise.

Ants are creatures of little strength,

Yet they store up their food in the summer,

Coneys are creatures of little power

Yet they make their homes in the crags.

Locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks.

A lizard can be caught with the hand,

Yet it can be found in king's palaces.

Back home, the elder sister sat in front of the lattice window and plaited her hair gracefully, nodded at Sheila to sit down next to her. Yasinia's eyes were like spears or lances, carving into the pith of spirit as a shovel cleaves to earth. Her glance could divide water from cloud and light from wind and pick out the veins on a blade of grass, separate milk from butter, bone from sinew.

She spoke to Sheila as she did so saying: In the life of a Kalash girl, though we may or may not have finished school, we never stop learning. This constant process of imbibing is what gives us self respect, which is most important. Your relation to the Benificent guards your honour. Just like the runaway the prodigal son suffered when he ran from the austere and faithful rues that were instituted at home, ultimately returning in shame, in the same way does the errant daughter suffer when she leaves the house if she does not do so honourably.

It is of utmost value how she does her chores and how she speaks to her companions. She is to listen well, and to be a good inventor and innovator, making well do cheerfully with little with whatever she has, whatever little she is given. It is an art, a craft, you see. She is to teach the young how to read the sacred verses and how to converse, how to etch, draw these rhymes on the ground and how to labor upon the looms and the fields and the kitchens. Learning as a child is an instantaneous process, indeed when the sinful nature is kept at bay, as indeed it takes a village to raise up a child from infancy to adulthood. As you have grown and benefitted from the village, so you must do your part by teaching the young your share of skills and knowledge that you have developed until now.

Play they can indeed teach themselves. How to play with others they will learn, when they learn how to work and how to cooperate in household labour and work on the farms. How to work as a group and how to work alone are two different things, and both must be imbibed if us folk are to survive.

When you are in the fields, stand up and behold creation, the slant of light on your cheek, waving through the apple branches strung with blood red fruit, its fragrance a better perfume than any attar, clearer than bread, fresher than a hummingbird's preened wings. Stand and be strong. Live by these things.

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Where were you born, O dawn of the eastern glimmering, whose pallour is of the veil of green lemon, mixed with the flames of orange tangerine, followed by layers of tulle of deep, sapphire blue merging into a soft, powdery robin's egg enamel?

In the hands of God, when he created the olive tree, branching out like veins of the human heart, goodly like the clamouring pages of a textbook, rustling in the wind, clamouring to be read, in his fingerprints when he tinged the moss with emerald, and softness of velvet and wool and cotton, shining with twinkling stars of dew resplendent in the fading light of dusk.

It was in the cheeks of a maiden who rose with the sun to go and light the bellows of the fire to boil the oatmeal, and to grind the pearly jowar millet in the family grindstone. It was in the blush of a peach painted red incarnadine with the sunlight's fingers and brush of the dew, that tease the music

out of the harmonium keys of the wind when it causes steam to rise from the streams and ponds and puddles gathered from the rains.

It was in the song of a wandering minstrel, clothed in rags and bearded with scraggly hair, playing on a harp, and when he created the branches of trees her created the jackfruit and breadfruit of the fuzzy exteriors.

Her eyes were flocks of ravens flying in the torrential rains, jackdaws congregating around a castle tower or lighthouse. Her hair was the thatched roofing, sunlit hay on a country cottage's terrace. Her skin was the rugged, knolly moor; dust grey and blushing reddish with the heather and bracken and moss and greyish leaved their blood tinted flowers blooming, popping on the breast of the rugged hillside plateau.

She gardened in the mansion's lands, and helped the scullery maid with culinary preparations. Joana was her name. Today, she weeded among the blue azaleas, clipping off the moose antler branched starry albatross, but weaving the carpets of moss to thrive and moisten as they collected dew and lichen, umbrella mushrooms and cloud fungus, which would dry up during the summer to form a rank, bitter cheese smelling side of papery effusion.

"'T'was not since the time of William the conqueror that any scullery maid had to cook so much," joked Jane. "And then she said behind her hand, "Just boiled oatmeal and blueberries and creamy milk for the kids, and then I'm off for the day," she said happily. "To pick up my niece and nephew from school and surprise them with the textbook mistress has bought with coloured pictures for the bairns' school-going."

John, the wandering minstrel, cum escaped prisoner, sat in the entrance of his cave, shivering near the crackling fire he had built. Occasionally, he threw sage leaves and dried twigs into it, so that it grew red and sent up effusions of sparks. He waited for the canary he had befriended to come to him and sing.

"The many mountains I've glided over,

Have braided streams tuned like violas

Interlocking and flowing among algaed channels

Floated over by snows melting and coursing like flannels

I am a bird of quick wings and soaring flight,

Unclipped and untuned and unkempt

Keeping company with wanderers

Singin my heart out like a loving nightingale

Who cares to darn the bushes together with her needle like beak.

John's fellow wanderer, Sibelius, said, "How infinitely preferable is the cold of the mountain air sinking into the valley from its scattered glacier, to the warmth of the jail cell. Freedom is truly worth the price of hunger, communication, the price of cold, and toil, the price of danger.

John resolved to fast in the coming weeks every Tuesday, to thank the Lord for the beautiful gift of life he had given him.

***

"We write, we compose, he that lives humbly shall be recompensed with starlight and the colour of dust shall be better than the hue of the gleam of gold. Dust is the thought that people from all nations put into their writings and we will write poetry in the dust.

Couplets with our feet in the sand, how do they read?

Dust coloured, o lion hued, o graceful maiden

Walking with three pots balanced on her headgear

A hand supporting them, a rolling gait

That tramples the waving sand dunes

Like a ship riding over waves at sea

O dark faced maiden whose veil slathers her cheeks

What tale do thy brows tell?

What stories thine eyes enunciate

Like arrows piercing, flying through the air,

Dipping, riding, soaring on the wind?

That's how Rebecca appeared, said Shiela, a rising figure in a sandstorm who gave water to Abraham's servant, although water was scarce in her part of the desert. She filled jars for his black, golden and cream camels also, whose humps were thin and waning. Dust is beautiful, it rises like ornaments on the wind; the colour of houses, with splashes of ebony grime, and moss curling and derelicting the mildewed walls, and pebbles, thrown upwards on the high wind, the hue of baking, the colour of buckwheat and oats, of a bundle of working peasant hands, and of the singed face of black rye-bread.

***

A mountain scene. A village clinging to a cliff-side slope. Chortens marking the gates, rising, tall, triangular, up to the sky, like birds diving their beaks into it to sing.

"Come, let us graze our goats on the hanging pastures on the other side!" Dolma calls to Peter.

They ran like marathoners to the other side, their goats following like tides of milk seasoned with salt and pepper, woodsmoke and ash, ready to squeeze and dry into cheese.

Mariyam is our refuge, the mother of Jesus. O, intercessor, please keep ourselves and our flocks safe from the ravaging wolves! May you confound their plans and their activities! May they turn their back son the flocks and fast and eat rice and lentils instead when they eat, from the hands of St. Francis, who attempts to reform them!

Peter was picking up pebbles from the path and lobbing them along far along the plains, or filling his pockets full of them, to keep in case thy had to pour them in their water jug to be able to drink out of it like a clever crow, who piled a jar with little water up with pebbles so that the water level rose and he could reach the water with his short beak.

He always remembered the story of the stork and the jackal, who were friends until the jackal decided to play a mean trick on the stork. The story went thus: the jackal invited the stork for a meal, but served the rice on a flat plate. It was all very easy for the jackal to eat, but for the stork, not so. The stork could scarce get any of the food down his long sharp beak into his stomach.

So he decided to play the same trick on the jackal, this time in reverse. He served the food in a long-necked jar, so the jackal could not get his snout or tongue into the food to ingest it. Then the jackal finally understood what a mean trick the he had played on the stork in the first place. And they both apologised to each-other.

Justice and fair-works, the work of our hands, in collaboration with the Lord's. We set in motion a rolling ball, a flying winged seed, which will not stop until it has accomplished what we intended. Seed to take root in the good soil, and to produce a tree of great magnificence and sweet, edible fruit.

Brown, mustard bark, lean sequoia wood, growing tall to rival skyscrapers on a shallow bit of land, be sure a storm doesn't come and uproot it, but the tap root grows deep and many termites and ants swarm across its rootlets, anchored in the damp, sweets-melling abundant soil, its branches reach unceasingly and widely into the air and draw oxygen from the sky, the trees' lungs are lined with green leaves and fig fruits and tiny, whitish, orange fig-blossoms.

Birds fly up into its tangling roots and beyond, grazing at the tops of its branches, perching on its twigs, making nests in its axles, chattering, cheeping and twittering sweetly as jam-tart, calling to each-other and describing the smell of the air, the bite of the fruits, the feel of the sunlight, the colours of the clouded atmosphere and sky, the patterns in which their nests, like tapestries of wool and silk, are woven.

And the young chicks learn from this schooling, how to talk and express their feelings, how to listen and mirror the states of others, how to synthesize knowledge and observations and conclusions, based on what they hear, think and have experienced themselves, so that the bond between them and others may grow strong.

Soon they will learn to flap their wings and fly, far beyond this tree, but after their gliding and sojourns to other countries and provinces, they will often return home to this intricately formed banyan tree.

A copper bowl, a brass bell. Fine grasses hanging in the window-sill frame, lemongrass to be dried for making non-caffeinated tea.

And from the window, you watch a stream skipping by, over sharp pebbles, in little sharps and trebles, some places glassy, other places murky, with small papaya trees growing out of the water around which small minnows dart and curve and play.

Brown moths and blue-yellow butterflies fly around in circles around each-other, their wings painted in dusty patterns, paired like with like, the delicate innocent things, making the most of the day in excitement and companionship.

A gulmohar tree, tall, graceful, with emerald fern like compound leaves, arching tall to the sky like peacock feathers, swaying and toppling in gusts of dappling breeze.

Monkeys, kittens and puppies all milling together and tumbling over each other, ears flopping and teeth clicking in raggedy play.

Speckles, gems and diadems of light shining in focussed funnels on the emerald leaves, growing in compound, fernlike order on a branch, shifting slowly as the earth turns, in a stencil or a grid, shining forth and tracing paths.

The sedge grows with a translucent, lambent light, and the blue-bells hanging down from the vines like a pair of intricately wrought earrings.

***

Sheila squealed. It was her birthday. Yasinia and Aref stood above her as she sat on her mesh cot, asking her to close her eyes. A mesmerizing shaft of light entered from the window to brush her

cheek. Yasinia leaned down to place something in her arms, which wiggled and was furry. Sheila screamed and her eyes fluttered open. She saw in her arms a tiny kitten, mottled brown, black with socks of white, squirming and mewing.

Do you like her? Yasinia asked. Ahmet brought her for you."

"Of course I do," said Shiela. "She stays with me."

Shall I take you to a Yak's altar sometime?" asked Yasinia. "Like they do in Northeastern country, Tajikistan, Tibet, as well as here, in Nuristan. We no longer sacrifice animals out here, but do proxy sacrifices to restore the sacred balance of the energy fields of the different members of the animal community, and of the elements and aspects of nature. Like an ox represents stability, a yak represents work in tandem, a deer represents speed and dynamism, an eagle represents vigilance in travel.

There they have a stone called red ochre which is ruby red and breaks like a brick, which they smash on the altar, topped with yak's horns carved from deadwood, and protected from the snow by a hairy wool blanket. They bellow as though seawater is slathering and milling against the walls of a cup, they blow a conch and smear the crimson stone against the stone altar, and then it becomes like paint or chalk, and you can draw mandalas with it.

This is what we do on bakri eid, instead of killing a real goat.

They had built a shack like shelter at the top of the mountain in which to rest in the height of noon, the midday sun when with their sheep, and once in the shack, everything was dark, somnolent and silent. The two girls' anklets stirred in the errant breeze, blowing Yasinia's veil like the sail of a lashkari boat, hissing in around the pot Sheila kept balanced at her hip, squeezed against her ribs, and she bent down to place it on the floor to cool in the shack while they minded the goats and the sheep out of doors.

The children playing outside visible through the window frames; engaging in a game of hide and seek! Like smoke drifting from a chimney, children wandered in and out and gathered in a circle, rocking to and fro on their heels, the boys with their hands in their pockets, the girls crossing and linking their arms, travelling in circles like ponies on a merry go round.

"We shear our sheep," said Avan, "Whereas goat hair is harder to use in clothmaking."

"We buy our wool from the likes of you," said Sheila to Avan. "The goats we keep mainly for their milk. And we are not itinerant, but settled."

"Sheep can hardly brook to go to the same pasture a second day in a row," said Avan.

"Goats aren't as burly as sheep."

"Sheep aren't as nimble as goats."

"Sheep chew with their heads down and goats chew watching the street."

"Ewes and rams both have horns but only male goats have them."

"Goats' legs are longer."

"We sing to our livestock," said Avan.

"We cast spells," said Shiela. "To make sure they grow right." Incantations of stewardship to bring forth good cheer.

"It's time we headed out," said Avan. "You can teach me some when we're out in the elements."

“There is a child in everyone,” Yasinia said. “Just as there is an animal in everyone. “Respect them, care for them and speak to them. For in the child and the animal is the backing of the divine and they will reward you greatly for your ministry; If you cultivate conversation with animals you will be able to speak to anyone holding your own and you will be wise enough to handle your own affairs earlier than otherwise, we will trust you with more responsibility than your age usually commands, with full confidence from your elders.”

“I certainly want to be able to do that,” said Sheila quickly and truthfully. “I’m tired of being told what to do without figuring it out myself.”

Ahmet stood in the doorway in the cold, and his eyes flashed. “Are you able,” he asked. “To feel the shivering of the trees in the autumn winds, their leaves shuddering,waving down one’s face in tears of sadness, and the moaning of the breeze in the bending tree trunks, snatching in the hollows and gaps in the bark?”

Sheila said, “If I feel this, then I shall do what is required of us to weather this winter: pick berries and boil and can them in the straw jars and wicker baskets which you have woven, and build, though it nicks the fingers and ravages the skin, bruises the throat and knifes, chafes the face, a shack for the goats that the new charges may sleep warmly nearby the house, as our house is full of the regular charges.” (grazers that have been left in our care by owners that put their faith in us.)

“And I,” said Yasinia. “Shall hang the cheese from the top of the roof so that it drips into the cooking basin over the central fire, and take the goats down to the bottom of the hills so that they shall chaw on ivy, grass and fallen sassafrass.

“Today, I saw four maynahs puffing themselves up, their feathers askew, and then nodding and dipping, and bowing on their skinny legs, expecting a reaction from their friends.” “Yes,” said Yasinia. “They do that to amuse one another,”

“Oh. And yesterday I saw the mother cat sleeping on the garden ground looking at us eerily and as we walked past, a streak chased us, and it was her little, misty eyed kit. It hid among the bushes when we walked among the palm fronds there, and we saw that it had curled up in a pot, and its head was turned, looking at us over the rim, And when we turned again, we saw the mother cat eyeing us warily.” Add new cat part. Add something cuter

“See how that kitten is surrounded by protection that has eyes in all directions? It was a wild little kitten we gave you, but that’s how it is with Allah, if you accept him as your parent and obey him, he will always watch out for you.”

Aref entered the garden and thought as he watched the cats play. He thought, “This is what Firdaus looks like.”

Seventeen times, they converted; he looked and blinked, it did not disappear. In a circle, hydrangeas, bougainvillea bushes, their long vines reaching out from trellised posts dotted with heart shaped, smoke like leaves, corolas emerging like coral flares.

The smell of jasmine fresh and sweet and cold, cornflower ocean welling up in one’s throat, the leaves pungent and stiff like waving green chillies, trembling, pierced and ringed emerald. It was waving in the wind, , fluttering, light, giving, welcoming.

The jasmine rose itself was the most beautiful and mesmerising centrepiece, lynchpin, keystone, deep and funnel like, jewel of the entire garden. The ruffles of its petals, the spaces, ridges gleamed like burning incense, radiant eyes adorned with fragrant kohl, lit like rivulets and beaks of melting snow, hewn out, soft, like cups of air.

Trellised, like the resting place of a pearl, with an iridescent sheen, centred like saffron, molten sun, egg yolk, leaking into the channels of the pinwheel rays of the sun, spinning , grooved , emergent, speeding, dazzling curves, turning crazily, the ridged, just bloomed petals like eroded sand beaches wave lapped-wrapped-shrouded, carved, chiselled, the sensile flesh of a snail, or the angora flourished sleeves of a jellyfish shot brightly through, painfully, cruelly by the feathery parakeet flight.

Its smell was sharp and shocking, sending spears and lances of broken ice, frozen liquid plasma flares, blue burning air, billowing like a woebegone scarf or skirt or shirt.

These shot bubbles through the fingers and forearms and the calves to the toes in the sunlight.

Behind him, there was fallen log, infront of which blades of grass grew tall.

On the peripheries of this garden, violets grew, which cows chewed, and when he put them in his mouth were so sour that it sent hot needles and piercing icicles through his veins, his open wrists, his buttocks and his thighs, all the way to his kneecaps, so that they became circles of glowing stars. But his calves, tarsels and phalanges, shins and arches and ankles were as though he had just stepped into a bog, into soft, stinking, sinking muck tempered with phosphorescent mass and blue green algae and yellow spotted, sea-ivy. His heels were floating, suspended, bouyant.

But when he was in the midlines of the glade, the feeling was in his stomach and around his waist.

All around him now was grass curling upto the skies, lavender and indigo flowers like water spears a rising up, crocuses peeking through the glacial sprinkling like diamond shaped sapphires, piercing the rent curtain of dust, glowing like prisms that slanted the gentle sloping light sideways like draped sheens of cataracts, flowing silk, dented and gutted with dew.

Several sparrows quickly dusting, lathering up the dust to float upwards, and coat their wing feathers which are wet with morning dew, so that the dirt will draw out the moisture and make their feathers dry for flying again.

Booping, looping, cheeping, chirruping, cheering, mynahs face each-other in circles of three four or five birds all at once, puffing up both wing and chest feathers, croaking and cricking, showing off how big and fluffed up they can be.

It's really adorable. It's animal behaviour at its cutest. And then, the sun birds fly into the vault of heaven, etched against the bright enamel, powder blue sky, zipping and zooming and flying, silhouetted against the sun like tiny flecks of an almost non-existent solar eclipse. And they glide like hang-gliders, soar like eagles, only more harmless, and they do not harm other birds.

A simmering cauldron, a sizzling pan; a bowl of steaming stew, carrot flecked, peppered with gourds and seasoned with chillis, thickened with rice and flavoured with tamarind, sending forth smoke, sending forth fragrance, to share among sisters and brother at the close of the day.

Shiela stirred it vigourously, nodding in time to Yasinia's songs:

A calling mynah, a chittering crow

A rooster saying cockle doo doo

A dove guttering, dancing in circles

A bulbul chuckling sweet throatedly.

Messages clothed in clouds roiling

Cast forth with lightning simmering

Pouring asunder with rain brimming

Flashing forcefully on the screen of the river.

A window shutting, a smokehole letting

A curtain billowing, a door rattling

An anklet chiming, an earring flashing

A cat climbing, lithely, stealthily.

Shiela's new cat stopped when people called her, and docilely burrowed into a pit of dust, graciously burying pebbles and grit, and then sharpening her claws on them when people weren't looking. She prowled about the yard and the green string beans and their poles, the water hyacinths and lily, the hibiscus and roses.

"Will you care for me when I'm old?" Yasinia asked the kitten. The cat crawled over her arm and onto her shoulders, where it bit her neck with her pearly teeth and clawed with her scratchy retractable claws. "Indeed," said Yasinia. I do declare that this is the most well-mannered cat I have ever had society with.

"But I have seen her prowling in the garden, said Sheila forcefully, searching for rats and for voles, chipmunks and moles, yea, lizards to feed herself upon."

"She doesn't get much from us," said Ahmet. "True," Sheila conceded, and continued, "I have seen her of an afternoon when I tear the naan into four pieces and cast them on the threshold and called her name, "Mira!" Then her shoulders and her back are all one, and she bows her head and nibbles till she's done and never was there a creature so adorable as her, so sweet and so deferent. She sniffs around the charpoy when she passes, as if the fragrance were a part of her due. As indeed it is, that Allah offers to all creatures that are innocent and have remembrance of him.

A scuttling ladybug, a scattering of hens, A spraying faucet, a linking of chains, a necklace of daisies, a donkey in a pen, a coral of horses, of hooves over a fen.

Clouds wavering over rooves, roiling and curling and bursting. Throngs of pigeons and of cuckoos, crows and peacocks yammering.

A posse of cabbages, growing; carrot leaves and turnips blowing; a bushel of potatoes simmering in the sun, a cartel of pears rolling over the sunlit field.

Sitting with Aref of an evening. Sheila has memories of Aref, his arms muscled sweet and hard as almonds, split down the middle, his calves like cashew nuts striding courteously and strongly, his arms full of bushels of wheat and apples, his blood tinted cheeks crinkling and curving in a saucy smile, his eyes dark as cavernous pools, reflecting the upturned mausoleum of the sky. "Come here, girl, and help me with these sheaves," he would say, and she would strap the bushel to his back, and carry two others in her arms. He stooped, his back sloping like a bat hanging, picked up the sickle and continued reaping, wending his way this and that like a bandit through the crops and shrubbery.

He talked through his teeth and sang and drank through his nose, gurgled and then said, "Sheila and I are going to weave a tapestry with flying peacocks, sparrows and roosters, which you can then make into a shawl, a headscarf or a skirt, and I can knit you a pair of mittens or a pair of boots.

The tattoos she has painted on her sister's skin,

Tells of clouds over skies, and spirit over flesh, of trees over earth, of anchors and boats over water, of rust over iron, of flowers over finely wrought leaves, vines and tendrils curling over walls.

Weathering them as experience weathers the workers.

Thus, tattoos hurt when you paint them,

But always there are tattoos on our hearts, painted over our souls, cooling and guiding them,

Like henna paste drying on the paisley-ed, arabesqued, veined hands of hardworking women.

Then there are others, who will admit no ornament to adorn them, and consider merely the redness of their palms, coloured by health, to be ornament enough.

At the village fair he had lassoed a pair of earrings; people had giggled at him: asked: "What for?" He had ignored their scoffing and said: "For my mother."

"He said also that "Words are our wealth, as foam is on white water, as clouds are to the sky, as hair is to a maiden, so is poetry to I. As pine nuts are to squirrel, as furze is to the pine, as flares are to the woodpile, so are words to I."

"They say the most valuable thing to an Arab is his language, which is his most prized possession. So to us Kalash, words are the most important, that with which we share our lives and our visions."

"I don't agree," said Shiela. "Doesn't much communication take place without words?"

"Perhaps you are right," he said. "Then perhaps our eyes."

"Sit straight," said Yasinia as they bent and sat upon their haunches to roast corn upon the stove or chullah. "You've no idea how many homegrown ills arise from sitting crookedly. Feel as if you were a tall poplar, growing and growing until you reached the pinnacle of the sun and pierced its slanting rays," she said, gesturing from its root to its tips with an unfurling hand. "And after these cobs are roasted, come, let me braid your hair with these wreaths of lilies, roses and hyacinths. It is fragrant and will freshen your hair like incense, making it bright and flaming as a burning torch, the already phoenix coloured that it is, with the henna you have dyed it with." Yasinia beckoned to the jute mat that spread out infront of her slender feet and bid Sheila sit there for the binding work.

Dryope sitting, her knees infront as the sun warms her. Shot her arrows to the south, her hair streaming, whisking, a shield to her face. There were more fields that unrolled, she feasted her eyes on them, and a waterfall that streamed. And around her was all red and gold, old wood and solar spokes. Tinkered beaten wicker and copper bells. Every soul is the recycling of another. The fluffy clumps of stray bushes and ivy, crop and grass.

The body of the sheel, rising, turning, glancing in the canon wash. Altars of fire and pyramid, bricks and stone, eroding in the flood. Mynahs on the railway tracks. Looking on all as a miracle, gasping as the veils are torn from your face. Moss, own the light. Not you cast, but God cast. May thy feet be as neat as lanterns, may thy face be as radiant as the sun, may thy arms be like hard sweet banana fruits floating on a river.

Sparkles, mineral mountain fizz, North star/ streams, shining powder, angel/fairy dust darting like diamond gleams, straying like a hair dividing, or splitting into smithereens. The teeth within her skull like an elephant's tusks or opal knives, her breath misting like tingling chimes. She came out like a sparrow from a nest, hay in her hair, a song in her breast, a bird peeking through her chest. And she turned her face upwards to meet the tree, her nose slanting, chin lancing, glancing, her skull and her cheeks flattening as her nose broadens, she turned her face sideways like a fish bending in the curved and gushing river. A jay carved lark and sparrows play.

Their songs and whistling at once, /the light emerges from the tunnel, warbling silver golden spindle fibre's spider's threading gleaming in the gossamer light. The wind and rain slashing, dashing, melting down the foam against the side of the mud brick walls of the shed.

The jay eared lark and sparrows play, /their songs and whistles at once,/the light creeps, gold, spindles spiders' threading/wind and rain slashing, seaweed melting on the foam. Rises, bends and

dances, shoots her blowing fiery lances, her arrows on the way. She glances, sees the way is clear, sweeps her arms to clear the way, un-reigns the leashes of the day, thundering, rushing, burning, skipping.

Upwardly curling, the vein of a leaf, tight spool wound, onion peel, garlic shavings, standing hairs, wet from the pool, winding trails, roaring bears.

The snakes, lips curving in a kind didactic smile, the whirl of a girl's girdle, the curved horns of an ibex, the curving, curling prints of a thumb like the whisking of a glassy wave, crested with

Jesus Christ is perfect, and you worship him all of your days.

O my dear, mistress of the emerald falls, protectress of the peacock blue rattle-throat, of the swaying eyelet circlet, piercing gimlet eyes like a needle, O lord of the swaying grace, the swirling wind.

The shady umbrella plant with their appendages ruffling

A fly scudding along the rafter, rubbing his palms together, the leaves rustling like doves roosting, or skirting jasmines flowing, white slices of mangoes and crisp jamun jade, katy did bitterness

But wait! Open your eyes and see the wonders around you. I'll see what others are, before I describe myself. As I stood measuring, there came a soul into my turret, and it was a most exquisite one, small and slender like a slipping willow pine, tall and gentle like a bending branch. A swaying rush, a fraying line.

I peer and turn away and gasp

The veils of light looked out, onto a haze of green, in a corrugated and misty valley of gushing streams, onto the realm of the elm tree, whose hanging ivy like fluttering gauze sleeves danced in the mist, in the cold dawn and bat's ears perky rabbits, snapping, arching leaping fish leaves, budding young water grass, green perked, branches filling the sky like an overarching dome, an infusion of webs and split sticks to buttress it, so that a rushing, milling, icy stream gushed upwards like a snowy peak, a spring fountain tall and bending.

"He is a deer," said Sheila. "He is an eagle."

He paused towards her, his white kurta billowing, holding some beads in the palm of his upturned hand.

"As I was riding," he said. I saw a squirrel burrowing in the ground for stolen nuts. It cocked its head at me and seemed almost to wink. I unwound my turban for him, spreading my headgear on the ground for him to crawl upon. This he did, and whereupon he was on it he did a small dance, scurried to all four corners of the pattu, circled around in the middle and nibbled on the beads, found they were not good eating.

He brought, one by one, a horde of acorns to the spread cloth and left them there as a gift to the owner who had spilled his grain.

He paused towards her, his white kurta billowing, holding some beads in the palm of his upturned hand. "Here, he said, "Are some trinkets from my torn pattu here, perhaps you can weave them into a scarf for me, or a necklace for yourself.

White beads of an eagle's breast, cerulean of a river's sheen, green beads of the grasses worn, red beads of the hibiscus crest.

"As I was riding," he said, "My grain spilled because I stopped for a squirrel that crossed my path."

"I was riding along at a fine pace, a high speed and suddenly my horse skipped a stone for a squirrel, a strip of lightning, crossing my path darting like a wick gleaming with fire. My bag of grains fell to

the floor and burst, spilling the golden seed all across the grass, like a bunch of injured bees languishing in the bulrushes. I saw a squirrel burrowing in the ground for stolen nuts. It cocked its head at me and seemed almost to wink. I unwound my turban for him, spreading it on the ground for him to crawl upon. This he did, and whereupon he was on it he did a small dance, scurried to all four corners of the pattu, circled around in the middle and nibbled on the beads, found they were not good eating. Quite glad to see the bees were alright,

He lifted two front paws and chattered, his eyes glistened and he swayed from one foot to the other like a bandy-legged teaser. Then he crouched, and arched his back, and rose, seeming like a whirling bit of mist, or a crackling flame, chirruping all the time like a canary or a mynah would when calling for a song.

He brought, one by one, a horde of acorns to the spread cloth and left them there as a gift to the owner who had spilled his grain. This is what I bring to you, for to make a stew out of acorns and pine nuts and season it with mint and thyme and weave the beads back into my headgear or to make a new pattu out of them, for my headgear is aged.

Sheila said She says go find your treasure

We women folk will work on the fields whilst you are gone.

We dream of you becoming one with the elements

The turquoise of the sky's dome

The towers and minarets of fountains form which you drink

For when you travel you become a magician

Invisible, translucent limbs merging with the wind

Earth coloured faces mingling with the sand

Your voices overlapping with the thunderstorm's awe.

O cheeks like mountain crags

O noses of sickled knives

Do not be silent and surly

But speak like a brook ambling

Over her path of rocks and stones though they be sharp

Telling of the scenes you saw

Of the people encountered

Of the dangers you confronted

On that perilous road

"We were travelling on foot with our cart and our horses when we came upon a posse of fighters, with whom we shared our afternoon meal and they asked us if we would join them on a raid of the invader camps. The men looked so unfortunate that we decided we would give them half of our trading capital, which was wheat, apples, raisins and dates from our orchards and farms in this village, though we would fain have gone back on our resolve, as it would have meant helping these unlucky and hopeless men. In the end, Altaf broke and said we would take the risk, but the fighters

said they were happy with what we had given them, though they said that if the country had more men like us, who shared their resources rather than fought, they would still be very hard pressed to get rid of the cruel invaders, who were consuming the breadbasket and ravaging all they passed. We felt our resolve crumbling (That was the deciding factor for us) and we rolled up our sleeves to join them, we walked at a pace a mile or two till we reached the Russian camp whose soldiers were up and away, and we took their stocks of wheat, left them their rice, and took their weapons so that they would have none for combat and we minimized the chances of fighting them. Our companions were happy with us then; they were thin, their weathered cheeks like cliff drops, their lips dry and parched, their hair like ragged brambles, their skin like leathern bags. Their eyes were lambent yet dark were wells of stoicism and courage, eyes that could pull a man out of the throes of death and back into the quick and throbbing of life. Their original weapons were hardly of any use, rusty, blunt daggers and makeshift guns improvised from the ruins of invader camps that had been raided by other bands.

When the invaders came bidding to us to buy our stock, we refused to sell it to them and continued on our way to the retail market, with what was left of our goods, which wasn't a lot. And that is why we come to you almost empty handed with hardly more than would feed the lot of us for a fortnight."

He stood in the carved doorway, his frame caving in, his eyes like interminable wells, and began to mutter:

"A pot filling, a girl rinsing,

A girl singing at the stream,

Light falling, the clearing ringing

Her song and speaking in my dream

A horse charging, a cloud thinning

A day dimming, the sun's lean

Sparks shower over cliffs and mountains, the distant seas

Over the girl's hair like thimbles

Over gold spun hay or chestnut bay

Ponies prancing, dancing,

Spinning chaff into wealth and wheat

Over an eagle's nest, spilling, milling,

It's youngling scrabbling over scraps of meat

This is what we avoid with every step of our feet.

We work hard so our young ones can have plenty."

He finished his shayari and went off to sleep, chewing on a piece of grass. When he woke again after five minutes, he jumped up, stopped, patted and stroked the horse's face, plaited its mane and lead it to the stables where it could cool off and rest.

When Aref came back, (he opened his hand to Shiela, bidding her reply.)

She said:

"The silky rocks glistening, the white beach gleaming

The moonlight's wealth strewing the countryside

Contained within a thimble, driving the wind and the tide

Like arrows pointing to the north and sails filling

Like a hard taskmaster bidding a horse jump at a ring

A ringmaster charging at a high wall, a gate of arbors

A vineyard of grapes, an orchard of apples

Like a forest draping a hill, robes of ivy, veils of moss

Shielding your eyes from the rays of piercing sunlight

Like a scabbard shields my hip, my fingers from my scimitar

They are kind, like water caressing limpets,

Like seaweed stirring the waves,

A mermaid's hair, a siren's song

A fish cleaving the water, its fins flapping

Whittling at the foam."

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Sheila was walking towards the cataract, her arms crossed infront of her, her hair flapping behind her, like a fountain of ponytails, a sprig of leaves, a branch of olives, a sprig of chestnut, a posse of crackling holly, the splendid rays of the sun. So little time, so little, she thought, until Avan's wedding, when they would lose her practically to another village.

She filled her pail with the swilling water at the geyser and hoisted it onto her head before Yasinia said: put your pail down, let's sit, let's sit in the waning light, said, the sun sets earlier and earlier, this season, fire going back to its anvil home.

Sit down, tell me about the shipper, she said.

The mystery of the Asian half smile;

My context can remain, even as yours appears

They both can converse,

One is not lost in the thrall of another,

Nor does the other demand to be the sole judge.

He knew, he forded the waterfall.

He was well aware of the many contortions into which people twist themselves.

He twisted himself into halfmoons for this, your humble servant,

To try to climb into my skin and to

See what it might be like to be myself.

Then he was off, crossing globes of light

Flying in a slipstream of luminescence and rain

Back to his guerdon of confusion

That at sea-ness when alone that pulled him so forcefully

Into climbing into other people's skins

Walking in other's shoes, for there was no other way

He'd make the journey than if

He wasn't' t temporarily not alone.

He was beautiful, drawn tight as a bamboo

Doorframe, his sinews congealing into a house of utter frugality;

A water carrier running on a pair of string bean legs

His face lit by the joy of the sun and

The haggard bloom of dawn of lemons

And fresh washes, purity of thatched rooves

And the starkness of stained-glass windows

In tall gothic cathedrals.

This is what happens in winter, when the earth becomes hard, unyielding with frost, saturated with ice and tough like unkneaded dough. The snow alights on the dark soil like geese on rocks, and covers the growth of seedlings, so that when it melts away the green slender stalks and stems are apparent poking through the snow, like a forest of pine trees dusted with white. The nights are long and clear with cold, full of fragrance, and dark like waters rising in the stacks on either side of the lonesome path that God commanded Moses to lead his people through…

***

When we first tried to bathe the kittens, they were really pretty scared.

"You hold the kettle, Sheila," Yasinia suggested. "And pour it over the creature slowly as I clean its fur."

The kitten was struggling. "Don't worry, little furball," said Yasinia kindly. "Your bathing will be over sooner than you can blink, little one."

"Really?" Asked Sheila chuckling hysterically, but stopped sooner than usual. Sheila poured the steady stream of water over the creature as it wriggled, but Yasinia held it secure on her lap, not caring if her clothes were wet too.

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Chapter 4. The Conjuring

A hailstorm was coming, she could smell it in the air – like bats whirling in a cloud, flapping and alighting on branches with a rushing sound that rent the atmosphere as dark nimbus sent its arrows down to pierce the earth. She put her arms up to shield her eyes and face from the onslaught and her hair was drenched, and she could hear the loud rattling and pinging as the hail hit her forehead and shoulders. She ran for cover, as fast as her legs would carry her.

When she got to the bivouac she bolted the door behind her, then on second thoughts left it swinging open so that other stranded travellers could access it.

Soon enough, there came a knocking at the door, a thunderous banging that she thought or feared would bust the bolting, for she had finally locked it behind her, and that loosened the boards in the door just a tiny bit like a wicker basket strained in the belly.

Who is it? She called Tell me who it is and you'll come in.

"A fellow traveller like yourself,' said a woebegone and haggard voice, with strained syllables. "Open up, I say; these hail are attacking me once again!"

Sheila unbolted the door slowly and let in a bedraggled and unkempt wanderer man with hair of dark, coffee colouring and messy as a sparrow's nest, skin of a similar colour as the hair, a buttoned coat, frayed at the elbows and patched at the shoulders, pantaloons that stopped at his calves, and bound, scuffed shoes on his broad feet, through which his toes protruded.

"You may as well come in," said Sheila feeling a pang for him. "Come under shelter."

"Many thanks," said the poor traveller, his thin chest housing a wildly beating heart and heaving, having run a distance from the copse across the open sand land to the bivouac which he had spotted just as he feared the lightning to strike the elms all around. "This weather's very unfavourable for those such as myself, poor men with nothing but a sack of seeds an'- an' cheese to sling over their backs and keep out the cold, and not even a tam-o-shanter to cover his head from the pinging rain. I was coming to buy and sell curds and cheese as a middleman, purchasing form the produce round about this near village, when struck at this inopportune moment, I was compelled to find shelter, having hardly a decent smock to protect me from the ravages of these wild, unforgiving elements.

"My dear man, are you truly a middleman, or are you something else? You don't look much like one, you have not got the belly or the moustache or the frown; indeed, is that all you do? You look as though you should be hardy enough to handle some bad weather, even with hail in it."

The man grinned, revealing pointed teeth. "You dislike middlemen, I surmise, from your tone? Indeed, I do other things, though not for money."

"What are those, then?"

"As an Arahat from Xingjian province of Khitai (China) I teach the martial arts and all manner of comportments to influence weather and crops, though my students are almost always poor and cannot pay me for my services. So, I sell produce on the side and travel to find new students once my present pupils have become masters, which they nearly always do within two years or so. More description

Sheila stopped, awed and eager. She braced herself. "I should like to become your next pupil," she said, knowing that only if she knocked, might a door be opened to her.

"You can certainly be," he beamed up at her, for he was the shorter and slighter. "Though it will not be easy, and there will be many fastings you will have to do to come out on the other side." More description.

"What else?" asked Sheila. "Privation am I already used to."

“First, that duality is the coinage of the world, and that opposite qualities must be pitted and balanced against one another, in order for them to take dynamic direction …Work and rest, warmth and cold, sweet and sour, salty and bitter, dark and light, tall and short; these must come into agreement with each other by battling and buckling.

Once you have mastered these opposing forces within yourself you can achieve anything, nothing short of conjuring rain, convincing clouds to part, commanding the cold to thaw or ice to freeze, anything can you wreak upon the horizon and have good come of it.

“Why, then, pray,” said Sheila, could you not command the storm to settle while you traded high mallow (cheese) or found the bivouac (shelter), so that you could proceed with the dealings (acts) that would profit you?”

“That’s just the thing. You’ve hit the nail on the head with your question. Using the arts for personal gain is forbidden, and will undo the self. And there is always a reason when one’s entitlement to use one’s powers fails, for example, the fact that had I not rushed to the bivouac, I would not have found my next learner, for far longer than would have been tolerable for one who must use his faculties to remain capable, an ancient sciences mongerer such as myself.”

“I see,” said Sheila fascinated. Can you show me a fighter’s move?

His eyes swirled like tornadoes in lakes, and he took up a stance like a shield defending all behind him, the weaker and the defenceless, who grew up stronger from his solidarity with them. The man was not burly, but lithely built, with veins jading his neck and swelling tortuously his arms, in his hands, and eyes slanted, almost as gentle and wary as a doe’s. As he whirled on the spot Sheila gasped as something fell from him, and she bent to pick an amulet from the ground, held it up to him as he whirled, a tree swinging in the twister, billowing, almost frothing at the mouth.

“It was meant to go,” he spoke through the corner of his mouth, sighing. “I invested it with tiger fury, tempered by the still water, boiled and hardened it with grave intention, that it would protect the wearer of it from the blasphemy of self-interest until they reached a higher level.

“I’ve always been protected from that,” said Sheila. “For the love I bear to my sister and brother, with whom I live. I pity thee, who have neither brother nor sister to share meals with, nor to protect against anything.”

“It may be as simple as it sounds,” said the teacher cheerfully. ‘There are more things to essay and attempt than merely one’s apparent duty, or perhaps we can tweak it a bit, as I do get tired. But come now, arch your back like a swan, and turn your hands like the turning rays of the sun. Find your centre, the column of self-sufficiency. Kick into the air and turn. You are the destroyer of all evil, the harbinger of consciousness, and knowledge. You create and redeem, charge mortals to morality and implore them to temperance.

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The sea is an embalming spirit; I sense it sniffing, soothing. It has wide gaps in its teeth for viewing. Look at where the light opens out onto you.

I would ever have things to communicate, for your eyes are the light, and you are the world.

I hatch no plot, I scheme no scheme

Fame and shame are one to me

Tow wildly drift, and yet to sift, the angels of the air is key

Falling drops, the skittering steaming Jay blue skies, the fresh air’s sheen

The grateful earth sends waves of fragrance

The Mynah wings and screams and dives and sings

The ferns branches lift like feather catchers,

The dew and dust alike, the rainbow's drawn,

The sunbeam's gleam, climbing the slow ascent

The falcon's beak, his beautiful wings

Flapping and turning, protecting

The blazing of the sun itself will teach men to walk in its ways.

To rise, to work, to feel, to dance. Homaira and Rahim Khan splashing through the stream, copper vessels clattering, pebbles rattling, her scarf gets a splattering, trailing like a white ribbon sail upon the waves of the wind

The sickle moon smouldering, quickening, guildering in the glints of the sea, geese beating, white cotton flapping, salt flows freshening in the curve of the lee.

The fairies were in accord with one another, as one moved, the others turned, as one stepped, the others danced. They were like the spinning of a diadem in a spiralling mistral, glistening, listening, for all anyone might know it was their very quiet clamouring spinning coaxing the wind to flow.

They were swift and their reckoning was sure. Their beaks were sharp and their talons shrewd. Their eyes were keen and their noses pure, of pinched form and piercing spleen.

Homaira leapt from the precipeice and landed on the snowy bank like a tern alighting on a budding branch, or a fire burning on a green bush. Her husband climbed, untill, his heart pounding for blood, his body reaching with all his might, tense like a taut rope or coiled snake wound and ready to spring. He was high and tight, like a balsam drum, his veins surging like rivers of marble, the wind was light

O Lord, protect them

Also, Homaira structured her roof like a mountain slat so that the sleet would keep running off of it. She pulled the goat and sheepskins she had knotted together over the poles/stakes of woody desert shrub that Rahim Khan had driven into the ground. She left a smokehole near the slope of the peak so that she could cook there in the wet weather.

Then, she walked towards the stream to rinse her hands and feet for the midmorning prayer. Puddles nearby the stream were awash in a gulmohar green, grown under by burgeoning blooms of moss, and shot through with pale grey azure strips of the sky.

After the prayer, Rahim Khan bent, elsewhere in the mountain's skirts, hammering nails into a cart for wire stringing. He bent from the cavity of vacuum within his chest, the beams from the crown of his head illuminating the way for him, his core full of strength, majesty, letting loose the weight of his hammer, wry nosed iron vulture, upon the leaning, gleaming screws, water coloured in the slanting light.

He stood, wound the chord around Homaira's blowing, flowing hair, and it unravelled, sparsening, kindling on the wind, eagle feathers drifting in its first flight, like so many sheaves of ripening golden wheat.

Sixteen times they crossed the Tulsi plant, each time it was different as they wound their sacred thread around it. Once grave green with spangles of silver, another time black backgrounded with coins of gold, shining, wavering in the morning breeze. Dew like the glow from the pedants or pearl or opal a woman drapes around her head, wafted with the fragrance of myrrh, or honey and smoke of burning corn or ground nuts.

Another time it was like embers, or rivulets of butter running among the stiff carded funnels, another, like an aura of fantasy or honiness about a sylvan fairy, with downy violet petals to clothe her, burning, casting pollen with her clear, iridescent wings.

She came to me, she came to me in a dream last night, fireflies agloam, that as I stood at the whitewashed balcony streaked with blue, roses of night in my hair and my limbs wrung through with a long day's labour,

Sebowisha, the sighing riverside rushes; lakdi, the bending branch of the sapling, banyan, the dewy, gutting leaves of the tree of a thousand, winding, hair like roots, each standing in its place on the banks of the stony channel of the river, in which my friends and I wade and wander, our feet bare and walking on the pebbles and shards which pierce our arches and soles, as though we are wayfarers, fakirs walking on nails.

A weathervane, spinning in the threadlike wind; spooling, creaking, bending, shivering, made of elder wood. Acsah hangs her third pink scarf on it that has been knitted by her rough, shaggy pashmina wool, smelling complicatedly of coriander, bayleaf and cardamum, cinnamon and asafoetida which she mixed with the vegetables she cooked and stirred in the kitchen stove, while she wore it to protect her from the blasts of cold drafts that came through the window ajar and the threshold of the closed door.

Her smile was bright (with apology), her hair red, she said, he tries me with complaining of the work I have to do, and then I wring the washing through, and hang it up again once more while there be no light.

She said, you don't have to worry, you can do, in one frame, tasks meant for two, for work will refresh thee, and when thou art spent, the night is a drink, a drought that would quench the thirstiest, parchedest throat, and yet imbibe the strength of jasmines, allus new.

A tiara in her hair, a sunlight's hue, an orange red parakeet strung with dew, she said, rage was not a cue, she said, rage it would not do, she said, slow, smouldering anger like buried wild fire, the million years of fission that smokes in the labyrinth, she said, you send it off, send off what you could glean, assimilate what you could gather, she said, turn it into whorling currents, torrents, galaxies, discii, rain showering through the night and changing it like aurora borealis, pretty blue and green and carmen pink, curtains rising of fluorescent dust.

Sheila said, "I was washed clean with tears, smoke and dust had fled me." Strong summer days, Yasinia brought them, shining like the wind on your face, rushing like the brilliant waves. She says, sweet, sweet, flowers are sweet, the smell, the feel, they swiff and they wheel," looking at Yasinia, "Proud thou art, while I am a reel," Steel, steel steel your self then Shiela, and onions will un-peal, pungent bulbs burst. .

Hail to your way,

Hail to your way,
Reverence to your laws of being
Let me not be too familiar yet, o emperor of the universe,

But guide my actions, inform my ear with your whispers,
O lord, as a kind rider, harsh, proud murmurs to his mare
One sees and then one stares, what way is there to of innocence
Only lead me as a sheep to his kind shepherd, that I may see only beauty in your passages, those of slate and those of crystal, while what is ugly I take unto my bosom and make it comforted and strengthen it with righteousness.

The sfumato mist curling and embossing and wrapping, enshrouding the trees, the woody stems streaked with smoke, the banks' texture becoming slippery under the moisture; branches leaning and dipping slightly as the rain lashes against them, the canopy green, sea-green, rippling in the cyclone's wind.

Blocks of rain and cloud advancing rent in places by sunlight, torn as the ragged vesture of a vagabond.

Singing in ecstasy at the storm, even as he searches for shelter in the forest, dripping his sodden hair is like the thatching of a cottage, or black dyed cotton sopping wet with drizzling, oozing rain.

This is a storeyed forest. Storeyed in many ways. There are tales attached to it, but also, it has several layers. The top layer or canopy, is the lightest, jade green, processing sunlight madly, the second layer, beneath, darker, emerald, deep green, chrysoprase, where the leaves are more abundant and the shorter trees abound, the third layer, the shrubs, tall, short, scrubby, woody, brown, knobbly.

As bats and vultures and eagles peer down at him and his sister, screeching at her, she speaks to them, "Shelter me, oh so proud birds with the shelter roof of your shingled wings, I am not a swan except I dreamed I was one, sleepy till even tide, when my mother had gone out to sell the produce and I was busied with brewing dinner.

Then I spread my wings and called like a goose as faery terns do in the morning when they sound their calls against the ripples and echo of the lake. And when my mother returned, we brewed the bread of scarcity, leavened with rising yeast and sweetened with the impress of our working hands.

Fasting is not everlasting, and nor is feasting, but moderation is the way. Similarly, company and solitude have to be balanced against each-other to ensure proper balance of mind and progress along the way of life.

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"… It is to be all pure wisdom and good counsel and exchanging views, and comparing truths and pars in nations, and stringing out world views for others to see and to pick at, and following traditions of one another's religions, and honouring one another's ways, and allowing one's hatred and suspicion to be burned away on a sacred fire and to drift away as smoke drifts."

"We must be balancing the sun with the moon, and the earth with ether, and the deer with the tiger and the panda with the chipmunk, the home with the fields, and the fire with water, and the winds with dust. This is the sum of our tasks today.

Balancing satiety with hunger and thirst with its quenching, the cloth with the wind and tears with laughter, and the talk of the house with the talk of the street or the workplace, and conformity with rebellion, and words with deeds and silence with speech, and anger with acceptance, and pride with humility, and learning with emptiness.

The horizon with the hearth, and the roots with the leaves, and the height of the mountain firs with the lowness of the ginger roots, and the crowdedness of the anthills with the lonesomeness of the desert, the protection of the castle with the desolation of the cliff range, the freedom of the seafarer

with the home bonds of the peasant, the thatching of the cottage with the shingling of the city house.

The pumice stone of the ragged coast with the polished gems of hiding deep in inland caverns. The angularity of the diamond with the curve of the geode, and the sweetness of the mango blossoms with the bitterness of the ginseng; and the swaying of the papaya tree with the erectness of the tall straight elm.

The roughness of the poplar and tulip trees with the smoothness of the eucalyptus, and the height of the sequoia with the depth of the sprawling savanna brush and crawling mosses deep in the void, and the fires of the forest with the frigid snows of the glacial fjords.

…

Asin picked up a flower from the ground and placed it in her friend Chiara's hair.

"It would go better in yours," said Chiara, and plucked it from her own to place it in the heart of Asin's topknot. "Why?" asked Asin. "Don't why me," said Chiara.

"I gave it to you."

"I've got better artistic sense than you have. Keep it."

Tzitla said: Asin, what is that flower doing in your hair? Did I not tell you you were meant to use fallen flowers for contemplation? Unpin it and let's begin the exercise now. You'll be glad we did sooner than later."

"Think of the flower as the world, and its centre as its heart. The heart wants to swallow up its petals. In the world's heart are all aspirations for more equitable ways of being a society, such as for fairer distributions of land, for judicious use of the commons, for self-planned labour and finer craftsmanship, thought up and executed by the craftsman himself, for people to think and debate and to war with themselves before they act, for them to appreciate the blossoms at the heart of bubbles in water, its sweet taste, for them to relish and value nourishment and air as refreshment and to shun intoxicant, for them to listen to their neighbour's tales without judgement, to solve his or her problems as assiduously as a well-meaning sibling and with sound advice.

Drink in the flower with your eyes, let it swim as water on the lake of your mind. Imagine that its centre, its heart, spirals up and darts through your nose, and you breathe it in, and you carry the centre with its whirling petals and dreams within your chest, and you observe rules regulatory rules for setting up common property resources such as pastures and copses, towards self-governance and supplies of energy along roads … realize now that it is supply that generates demand, and not the other way around.

Copses, common pastures, waste lands and threshing grounds, watershed drainages and rivers, streams and village ponds, banks and beds.

The use of these was coopted by rich landowning households, even after the land redistribution act came around. Instead of the land being given to the poor landless, the land was redistributed among the landlords in the names of their tenants. The intensity of use of the common lands increased, and their degradation began. Instead of being used to graze cattle or sheep or goats, these lands were put to crop cultivation, a nutrient leaching activity they could not sustain and their already poor soil was diminished further in its quality.

We need to get these lands back into the common property category, and to institute their proper upkeep, by replanting grazed herbs and shrubs and the regulation of grazing upon them. But in order to have this done, we have got to petition the government to make legal the redistribution, and this will be a challenge, as the government and large landholders have many connections. For

now, war will therefore have to be waged on the spiritual front. Tai chi in the fields, with strong intention in the mind of transfer of lands and resuming of the common people's usage, and the making of talismans to sell to the rich landowners and to give to the poor landless each apiece, to turn all dispositions in the direction of such changes, will be in order. And we hope it will work.

"You really know how the blood goes in my being. A brushstroke of light, crossing the wall and the swing. The trill of a cardinal, echoing off the cliff and ringing, a pair of leathern sandals the girl towards the tent bringing.

"I swear to you, dear sister, that my training is to make me a true lover whomever the earth will call for rues, one whose strength is at the depths of her core, unfolding like a sword from a scabbard to mercy strew. Never violent, but self-containing is this discipline of hidden might, a swirling wind and whirling eddy of the limbs and clothes to keep from sight; to become the breeze that flows and the sun that shines and the elemental forces' fight; to saddle to injustice and ever, ever make alright.

What is this new folly? Said Yasinia imperious, but gentle. "Are you to become another fighter of an oath? What vows have you taken? What people seek you to defend?

"I will defend the friendless and the penniless, lame and downtrodden, landless, blind, mute against tyranny and neglect, idleness and degradation, and right now have begun to study under a teacher most sought after, renowned in Khitai's land.

How will you do so? Asked Yasinia.

I shall teach them, said Sheila. How the blood goes and the forces that eddy, and the whirlpools that cast shields of defence, to get good prices on their labour and goods, shaking off the bloodsucking leeches of the landowner, the moneylender and the middleman. No longer will the factions fight each-other, nor inward nor outward, bleeding the people of their resources, causing bloodshed among young men and old, civilians and children."

"If you can achieve that, t'will be something," said Yasinia. "You've got to learn to manage the forces in your own being before you can manage the forces in others'."

The tents of Kedar, she said, approach to tell of the spring, for their dwellers will follow the vernal grasses on the Southern slopes, their cattle will carve the moss and bark from the sides of trees and will chew them in the swirling mist, milling in around the rays that pierce them in between.

The dark sisters, twinned in one night, come for to train you in carpentry, in soldiery against the evil one, herding and iron workmanship; the sextant and the compass will avail you still as you chart maps of this wild terrain, in making fine instruments and navigating your position through the forests through which they lead you to gather, the people. Teaching them the distance between stars and the degrees of angles, will avail that they will always find their way, however deep the shrubbery and will keep you hard pressed for anything else. So remember not to mourn your location, or decry your position, but rather take care to make good wherever you are, with whomever you are. Sharpen your skills for earning a living, for exchanging with the people, and you will be happy.

A teacher is someone who guides you to the truth, someone who gives you courage for adventure, who gives you knowledge and wisdom to face challenges and speak parables in their face.

Every child, and every person walks towards the proverbial spring arbour, the archway of the secret garden. Sheila did so, her hair spread in tangles and webs above her eye-brows. She knew it would be the place where she met Gibreel, the angel, or Tzitla the instructor and the rest of her classmates.

"You must know yourself," said Gibreel to them all. "You must study, master concepts, let them become a part of you. And when you eat, let it only be towards your sustenance and those of the others. Produce something to offer in exchange, of value and give it to them in return for this,

learning how to work and cooperate with others through play and collective work. Then you will be equipped for the tasks that confront you, that you must face to pull your nations out of despair.

Who is the subject of adventure? And what is the object of it? Our work must be integrated with the hope and grief of those we serve, although we must also laugh for the sheer pleasure of doing… I say to each of you, that God has given you so much, it is time you returned something to him and to your people.

This could even be in the way of encouraging free speech, and practicing free speech amongst yourselves and your families. Do not take oppression without offering full homilies in return for it, denouncing what they do to you and warning them that they will be called to judgement by God for what they do, and will have to be answerable, even if you forgive them for it. Do not allow oppression to be acted out infront of your own eyes to others, or behind your back, as there is always something you can do about it.

Do you not agree that before every observation we make we make value judgements? And therefore is it not impossible to make observations without these being coloured by our views on things and our values, ethics and norms? We approach every observation with a kind of question. And the questions we ask originate from our values.

For example, when asking which nations will be most affected by climate change related weather disasters, we are implicitly asking whether the least developed countries (LDC's) and small island developing nations (SIDs), who had little part to play in bringing about the bulk of global warming, will be as affected by climate change induced weather disasters as developed countries (DC's). If the LDC's and SIDS face as much or more due to inclement weather and sea-level rise than DC's, then DC's should both mitigate more and pay damage costs to the affected nations, funding resettlement and redevelopment in these regions. There is a chance that all SIDs could be forced to move their residences of settlements entirely to a non-submerged region of the globe. Countries like Afghanistan should be allowed and encouraged to develop, increasing their emissions towards improving the living conditions of its people, whereas nations such as the United States should be encouraged to bring down their emissions drastically and to fund research and development of green fuels and energy efficient technologies.

In this sense, the notion that DC's will benefit from higher temperatures due to climate change, augmenting their grain and fruit production, and asking whether DC's will face fewer instances of inclement weather than SIDs and LDC's is to enquire whether the thief can get off scott free with his crimes.

Have you ever tried removing knotts from your hair with a comb? The more you hack and pull, the tighter and deeper the knotts become. It's only when you prise them apart by your fingers in different directions to suit the particular angle of the tangle, working from the root that the knot becomes unravelled. Problems in society are like that.

The dicot plant is an arching figure, stork like, its branches like the wings, its leaves like windows that colour the light that passes through them an emerald green.

On the upper side of a leaf, cells possess more chlorophyll than on the lower part or the posterior side, because they are exposed to more of the sun's rays. On the lower side, there are a greater number of stomatae, or air windows, which allow diffusion of air, i.e., oxygen, Co2 and water vapour, between the inner chambers' cells of the leaf, and the outer atmosphere for respiration and photosynthesis, the production of sugars through CO2, water and photons, and the exchange of gases CO2 and O2 for running the plant metabolism. The lower the prosperity of a place, and the closer it is to moderation in the fulfil-ment of its needs, the more deeply it can breathe.

Higher humidity causes the stomatae to close. This reduces transpiration or letting off of water vapour from the leaf windows to the air outside, clamping down on the ability of the leaf to give off heat at a higher than desirable body temperature.

Since water has a very high heat capacity, due to the dipole shape of the bonds of the molecule, the fluttering motion of the dipole bonds causes that heat energy to be retained in its molecular motion and the inability to give off water vapour through the stomatae, causes heat to be trapped within the plant, sometimes speeding up or slowing down its vital inner processes.

Winter wheat crops could be endangered because they require lower temperatures, i.e., in between 0 to 11 degrees C in order to vernalise, which is the means by which the plant produces flowers and a harvestable product of seeds. If this period of cool temperatures is missing, it is possible that the wheat plant will not produce any grains at all.

The wheat plant requires 6-8 weeks of the cool temperature for vernalization to take place. Some two-year vegetable crops operate similarly, hence it is not necessary that warming global temperatures will benefit countries in which colder weather has hitherto been common. The perception has been that warming temperatures in the extreme southern and extreme northern hemispheres, would lead to an ability for them to cultivate a wider variety of crops. Many indigenous varieties in the tropics and equatorial regions will have to be abandoned, and replaced with crops more suited to a warming climate.

But this is not necessarily the case. And it is the reason some countries in the Northern Hemisphere have been reluctant to carry forwards mitigation efforts they should have to curb global warming. They simply do not see what harm it would do, as it seems it would benefit their agriculture.

“Don’t never worry about nothing,” they say. “With magic you can accomplish anything, even the acquesiance of your enemies.” And in response, Tzitla said: “Do not think that when you have magic you have everything. Indeed, that is not the case. First of all, order to begin to have what you need, you need obedience and faith in God, honourable livelihood and the ability and desire to work hard and with sincerity. Second of all, in order to continue in one’s strength, one needs to have habits and thoughts that are inherently non-violent and non-aggressive. It is the serving type that rules and inherits the world, and is found by all to be most attractive. It is the martyr that wins people’s hearts. It is the one who accomplishes and loves that is immortal.

And shall I tell you why?

We like to believe God bestows success on those who work hard, but not works hard in any old direction. It has to be intelligently, intuitively directed. You must find your calling and work for yourself and for him, as well as for your family, your neighbours and your friends. But today’s world, at least in the west and parts of the east, does not support the creative instinct, but supports the materialistic one, for which men and women are supposed to do whatever they can to fulfil, even at the cost of their desire for personal truth, the perception of beauty, the feelings and acts of love, the establishment of peace and harmony.

This is not the way to find realization of self; through self-directed and planned work, and through knowing one’s preceptor, one’s creator, and the other. Serving the belly-god will never result in true growth if one enlarges the belly of another through sincere labour, even while only keeping one’s hands clean of greed and relating to ones colleagues. Because you are not truly helping your boss; you are only helping him get richer.

So, as a class, we will choose a bit of commons and rear a vegetable garden, wherein we will grow turnips, onions, carrots, cabbages and potatoes, from which we will draw harvest and eat, and cook from when it is grown. Even as we learn the comportments off weather control, mathematics, physics and chemistry and biology, literature and history of our motherland, and her neighbours and of the world. Remember when coming to the class, to dress modestly, to speak considerately, never

thinking to show off in your manner, words or attire, nor to gain an advantage over your classmates, for out here, learning must be a collective process. The Quran says that folk should not dress to impress others, but for necessity.

The plant possesses two types of tissue: phloem and xylem. Phloem contains pores through which water can be transmitted and flows, whereas xylem is harder, providing the mechanical structure for the plant, and allows less of this water through capillary action. Leaving the skin on potatoes while cooking is more healthful than peeling, as there are countless vitamins in the skin.

Morphologically, plants possess roots, which ground them in the soil, stems which hold it erect, and leaves which capture sunlight and transform this energy via chlorophyll molecules into sugars, to be stored and used by the plant metabolically.

Leaves and branches sprout from auxillary nodules and apical nodules on the stem of the plant.

Angiosperms are plants that grow seeds within the protective casing of fruits or ovaries. Gymnosperms grow seeds without the protection of these, like ferns, cycads and pine trees. Although cycads look similar to palms trees because they have branching leaves, they are genetically dissimilar to them.

There are two types of angiosperms: monocots and dicots. Monocots have only one direction of veins on the plant leaves, wherein all the veins run parallel to eachother, whereas dicots have veins branching out from the main stem, a central vein down the middle of the leaf, along which many smaller veins explode perpendicular to it.

Once you have discovered the task of your destiny, do not waver. Others may try to stop you, yet do not deviate from this. People need to find freedom, the liberty to do what they are inclined to create, the worlds they have lived that they seek to describe to connect others to their circuits of rambling, their orbits of musings, their thoughts, hopes, prayers, horrors, which they by sharing ease, the burdens to be cast off by working in the world of brotherhood, the iron monger's workshop to seek and forge a collective future through the beating of hammer upon the nail of collectivisation of property , of hammer upon metal, of swords into ploughshares, through the wending of dried reeds into a braid to pull their canoes with, and then to caper and run and gambol among the weeds and reeds with their children, showing them their human trades, but also the divine masterpieces of nature.

Tantra means technique. Swatantra means self-technique, or self-knowledge, the freedom that comes from these and was the word used in the Indian independence movement.

Know yourself and then proceed further foreward, which also translates into 'know your neighbour and then proceed on the path of life or business with him.

Mei and Sheila sat together on the bench dangling their feet in the stream, their feet tingling with minnows which rubbed against them and nibbled their toes.

"I have always perceived that when I was kind to its inhabitants, I owned the copse and the river," said Mei curiously. "Let us someday gather the children and the men and tell them to learn from the creatures who obey those who are kind to them, such as pack wolves and sled dogs, house cats and dolphins, rather than learning from those who try to dominate and rule them, asking them to fight in this battalion and that, so that their ethnic group can come out at the top of the hierarchy, and rather live as we live, embracing differences and forging a rising path together, into the territory of the hallowed and what stems from collective communication and truth.

For example, we know that when the ground is sharp, laterite and jagged stones piercing the soles of the feet, that is when calcium exists and persists in the soil and there could be caves and

underground rivers beneath, and that the soil is good for growing laden wheelbarrows worth of crops and greenery for fodder and food.

We also know that when water tastes bitter and brackish, it is best for the cleaning of the human system when drunk, and is good for scraping dirt, and mildew from the skin when bathed in.

We know it is best to scatter seeds beneath the canopy of a tree that is neither too wide nor too thick, so that the crops will grow in well anchored soil held together by the trees' roots, but nor to be starved of sunlight nor rain.

Ferns grow from lichens, which are symbioses of moss and fungus, algae and mushrooms. And, where ferns grow through which sunlight filters, it is very fertile, the plants breaking down and weathering solid rock and preparing it for insemination by seeds and other procreative strategies of plants, as the roots split the rock into smithereens.

Some say the discourses of knowledge of the oppressed are more complex and far reaching than the self-philosophy of the oppressors.

Tiny, gentle, wraithlike roots prying apart the rock, showing the work of the imp is growing to be strong as the turning of the spade of even the brawny and muscled farmer who hacks at it with his shovel, driven by his back as he attempts to break it into manageable sections."

And we know that persistent, unforgiving rain tends to pour down on Tuesdays, with gusts and whips of ships' sails and puffs of chilly giants' breath, frozen by fairies' kisses that sew and brocade with icicles, pretty snowflakes in them, scurrying, flurrying, spiralling down the chute of air to blast our cheeks, our hands and our feet, and giving us chilblains, and rosiness, smite the earth, inscribe with it the power of needles, the flowing of rivers between the palaces of anthills that open up into the fertile, sacred alluvial, in which seeds explode, sprout, blast and grow like virulent barnacles, anchoring in the substratum like pitchforks in bales, trailing, sewing trains, bride's veils, chimaeras, and the forked tongues of lizards and dragonflies.

We know that ecosystem resistance and resilience are both the reasons why creatures do not perish in certain instances, despite human interference and intervention. Resistance is like dangerous foxes which hunt down competing humans, while resilience is the springiness of grasses which perk back up as soon as the human heel or iron-rung-quick-shod-horse-shoe has trodden them down.

We all skirt and leap and dance, like wedding guests, leprechauns, gnomes, leaping over a brook. Or like travellers walking through a meadow field filled with flowers like periwinkle and blue iris and cornflower blossoms, mistaking it for water, hitching their skirts to their knees.

And wend and wind our way around the scrub, like pipers on a spring equinox.

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In the arms of the night, I dart and play, like a mermaid swimming in the moonlight. I spread my fishtail upon a rock, among the kelp and the moss, like an eel curling its fins around a coral reef.

Water quenches my thirst, and the coolness of the breeze satisfies my hunger for an embrace. We all wait together, for you to turn around and join us, those who have loved the night and to whom the night has been kind.

One soul can indeed intercede for another, if one enters into prayer and attempts to feel the location of another soul, and to feel the turmoil and sadness it is in, attempt to merge with it and enter into its suffering, expanding to envelop and dilute this with one's own wisdom, joy and strength, one can infuse the springs of living water into the soul which is lost, and bring it to guidance and the path again.

And salvation is full of warmth, bliss and knowledge, lead on by logic and the sweet rewards of hard work and persistence.

And let not the cares of this world, mask your understanding of its causes, its depth and its views.

Scraping, shovelling, shoring. Lifting heaps of dirt from the compost pit and casting them around the field as though it were manna raining from heaven. But, unlike the ancestors who ate manna and died, these plants would not perish, but would partake of eternal life.

“Make sure you don’t pack the dirt too closely or water won’t be able to get in and make the seeds and bulbs grow! Said Tzitla emphatically. And don’t put any seeds too closely next to eachother. They need a good amount of space for their rhizomes to take root and spread so they can soak up sufficient minerals to grow the stems and come up through the soil to sprout leaves and start processing the sunlight.

When the stalks grow long, we will put sticks in the ground and wind the stems around them so they don’t trail on the ground, getting covered and ambushed by other plants, but can grow steady and erect, twining their leaves to the light.

“And never,” said Sheila to Avan. “Kill one plant for the sake of the other, but rather, uproot one and let it grow in a different patch if it is interfering with the progress of your crops. Weeds are legitimate plants too, and often tend to be indigenous to the land itself, rather than always being invasive plants, they are sometimes and quite often native to the region.

They are the plants that offer no obvious use to us, except that they fertilise the ground with nodules, add nitrogen and humus to the soil, and hold the grains of dirt from being washed away by rain with their roots. They are the least demanding and the most productive.”

“The happiness that is closest to sadness, that is the best kind of happiness. It is the happiness that comes from knowing one has been forgiven, that comes from knowing one has been offered a second chance.”

“Don’t bend over to pick things up after a walk.”

My God is the God of Work, not that of empty ritual.”

“Forgive people for their mismeanders. Those who don’t forgive people tend to go to hell. But never, and never forget, because your survival depends on remembrance.”

“And do NOT worship idols. Nuristan was converted to monotheism 200 years ago for a reason.”

“But the chapter Isiah says, that in the time of the coming of the son of God in every generation, the Christians will worship Him, and be liberated, but all other nations will also be free to worship their own gods without reproach or chastisement, each seeking their own salvation.

‘Kafirs accept you because you’re mixed, Muslims feel sorry for you because your mothers’ people were so recently converted.”

‘Be loyal to those of dark skin, for it was ought among those that gave you birth.”

‘Me and my friends, we give power to each-other.”

“Don’t accept kisses from anyone other than the ones you love.”

In the path of Mohammed, tripping camels high stepping through the sand, flicking their tails, chewing the cud, their ears flipping, kicking up mud.

Camel drivers, wrapping their leathern faces in coal black, grey and white cotton swaddling, pulling it over their noses and revealing only their eyes.

Bedouin maidens with eyes lined with lamp black, pulling buckets from the well, filling their jars for the caravaners, their veils bedecked with colours and the shining of stars in the evening.

The sickle moon, which is the reaper of all sorrows, stooping and plucking form the gazer the weeds of his heart, which when lost, he realizes he values the most.

And whom would know, that it would take company and employment to stop men and women from doing injury to their own health through opium?

The sickle moon, the earrings of his love, which ring about her shoulders like the spheres' music in the sky that is draining of light."

"Don't look into the mirror too often and never till you've done your duties."

The sickle moon, a beckoning hand, ushering them to walk, to make the journey across seventy miles of barren sand, following a caravan of cargo and pilgrims. And it smiles, because it knows as the wisdom flower teeth of maiden knows how much they will thank it at their journey's end.

Hakiya, their immediate neighbour, was sick, and thus Sheila went into the copse to gather wild beet to stew into a broth to warm her throat, and to find a tree she could call Hakiya's namesake. These are the things she did in the room of the open air and pine forest.

Sheila catapulted herself over the muck and the stone cairn, to come to rest on the volcanic flow that had hardened, wishing to see if she could feel the textures and tinctures of the banded rock, the piercing crystals of quartz, the slender fronds of the bryophyte moss waving their hair on the weathering, broken down stone that pierced on the bare and calloused soles of her feet.

She ran her fingers along a split that had occurred in the flow, due to the sapling that was poking through the lava, and had refused to be incinerated, tall and sturdy and hardy, the bamboo was now empty, filled with air, but burly, she tied her hair around it and walked in a circle, she stood behind it, making signs for 'beautiful, self-sufficient, fertile, determined, but open to what the winds say, sweet smelling and soft souled, mellow sounding, a flute hollowed of a stick, laughing, spinning rays of sunlight strands of hair, and outstretched and unfolding, giving, invisible strings from fingers around the stump, hoping that it would sprout again.

Oh, bansuri, Hakiya, tall like a lovely sheer leaf maiden in spring,

Fingers shapely, used to patting strings into place on a loom,

Walking briskly, walking slowly,

Bringing light into the gloom,

With grass for long, shaded hair and eyebrows and eyelashes,

And gravelly pebbles for teeth

Blackened by the fungus rot she has painted on them,

Not stained with betel quid, but with lichen.

Because she is open to the ravaging spores of the wind.

A lantern roughened face, like sequoia wood

And glowing eyes like a river silver in the moonlight

Cheeks telling of reveries and smiling, wild wondering and pining

Bends to cut the stalks of wheat

Sunken, virulent, from their roots

Knowing she must pay for what she takes,

But she is already thin, bled dry by poverty,

Forgive her

Collarbones, bursting and ribs, from her chest like

The poles and beams that make up a house,

Her body is a house of cedar; a shelter, a lodge

Of mountain juniper and fragrant pine

Enervated by springs of nectar mixed with brackish water,

Her nerves and blood vessels are,

That moles drink from in the summertime

Her fingers are inked with indigo and carmine,

Her neck spotted and spattered with droplets of dye,

Lit from within by an inner light

Which she has mixed with her industrious hands.

Just because she is stained by work,

Does not make her less pure.

But she is unsullied by idleness

And happy to do more.

The household survives by her,

By the soft butter churned by her hands

And the bread she kneads and flattens with her palms,

Leaving their impression with their honey-scented fingers on the thin loaves.

The family keeps warm by the woof and weft of wool she knits, crochets and weaves,

Into warm shirts and skirts and blankets and curtains, ironed by metal

Heated by hot coals from the stew fire, and potatoes she bakes on spits

And cooks and sears upon them

Hakiya said: the kind of work we are expected to do is very different from the work that they do. It is very much the leftovers, the work no one else would do, seemingly trivial stuff, looking after the infants, the sick, washing and scrubbing the grease from dishes, scouring the scum from bowls and platters, after we have eaten the crusts, for there is little else for us to eat, and the toil of our hands, making them rough, the water that washes our fingernails away, that we must walk miles on starving muscles and strong ligaments to gather makes our skin wrinkled and wearied and webbed, like gooseflesh or duck's feet.

Nobody else wants to do this work. Making candles by firelight, from the melted down fat of sheep and whales, transported across the tundra, through central Asia into our *watan*, our country, our motherland, before it turns rancid; nobody else wants to do it.

Growing and buying vegetables, flour, spices, lentils, carrying them home on our bent and knotted backs, with years of carrying buckets of water, hauling bushels of oats and millets, pulling ploughs through the earth like can openers, nobody wants to or rather has time, to do this work.

But would they survive without us doing it? They know the answer, and that is why they keep us as slaves.

Chopping, kneading, stirring, coughing at the smoky chullah.

Darning, mending, stitching. Sewing hooks and buttons, zippers, snaps, hems, seams, adding a flower or two of brocade or embroidery to transform a drab brown dress into one to be cherished by our daughters, the thimbles, flattening our thumbs, the needles piercing our calloused fingers and pricking the cotton cloth, the threads pulling, searing, tearing, flying past our fingers as we drag the needle out the other side.

This is what I am trying to tell you. Woman's work is what no one else will do, because men have to earn a living for all the family. But could they earn a living without us caring for them? Cooking, cleaning, washing, mending, which is what we do, as well as going to the field or factories to work, as the men already do? Could they survive, doing both? Even a body as broken down, hardened, and inured as my husband's needs to sleep, please do not rob him of it. And so of the housework is the wife the queen of the slatterns, a proud rebeless and insurgent woman.

The capitalist pays for my husband's labour and controls and exacts my work, and that, but without compensation. And so the most hardworking women are bled dry, bone dry and skinny, drenched with clothes' rinse, with no money or property of their own. That is how society has ruined hardworking women, and grown richer and richer by swallowing what is their due.

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O, lord of the thrashing piper/swallow/eel/fish leaping and surging of the soft aggregate scales between which lichens grouse and browse, o lord of the suspended hummingbird, of the crying parrot green, fresh as an unripened papaya, screaming, crying, its wings spinning and tail flicking, like an axle funnel, o lord of the changing chasms of light, of the golden veils, petunia pink, cobalt, silver fish, sun-kissed ivy.

There is a time when you decide that you are scared no more.

The turning elves, cavorting in the turning, ruffling morning light, the screening crows, swooping and cawing and diving in flight, the fairies swirl, like billowing feathers in an eddying wind, the swans curl and soar like swilling water in an inky, stormy lake bowl.

Seven times fashioned and folded from the arc of a falling star, closed and wrapped like a bud endowed of march, whispering, giggling, chirping, twittering, milling, thawing chasing, scudding.

The elf walked quickly and pertly down the diamond pointed sharp stoned path. There was much work to be done that day. Petals to be pierced, stamens to be threaded, lilies to be guilded, leaves to be trimmed and serrated so that they both quivered, trembled like many discs glittering, nodding, shimmering. But words are eternal.

He walked as though on egg shells, jauntily as he went.

The tassle braids of his goose bumps, the dawn's heat rising from his cheeks. The cold mountain streams rose in his throat, he dragged the jute sack out behind him, trailing mud, so that they could

hang and the rain plink
He loved to sit in the rain, between four branches, hearing the rattle and plink of the storm maiden's pearly tears on the stones. (Wollstonecraft) He tipped the stem, with its curling pistils, into the sparkling pool. It came up shining, strung with dew.
Standing up, he saw that the shrubs in front of her had cleared with light. The gulmohur tree bent and twisted its arms up to the abalone sky lagoon, its wings whirling and stoking, shone white and purple, streaked with bird shit, its pods spoking, hung like tangling scabbards, interlaced with filigrees of silver peepul leaves and the drooping platinum shoots and tendrils.
Infront of it, the gracefull guava tree raised its dusty, fang shaped leaves to the light, its bark crisped and lightened, some smooth, brown, black, wet, patches encrusted as it were with barnacles, or nicked spots, where the jewel bright phloem shone through.
The leaves rustled like doves roosting, or skirting jasmines flowing, dissipating beige into the star strewn jungle of dark, jade veins, wax and glistening
Cool, like bakhoor, kohl or kajal incense.
Whirling colours and cold splashing rivers, weathering rock and flying foam, canary and fuchsia and indigo, above the ivy, moss, scum, viridian, jade, hay, amber, malachite, fly the scudding sky blue.

The beautiful day marched fore-wards on its wings of gold, its feathers that gleamed with mother of pearl. There were men, their teeth bared with determination, gleaming like yellowing ivory, their faces drawn like tight drawstrings, pushing carts in the midst of the day. Conjuring with a wave of her hand, making light with the fluttering of her fingertips.

And why and where shall we turn at the dusk of the Day?

Of brave young Lochinvar! What hath the turning of the spade taught your heart today?

"Write worlds, imagine and recall the beauties and the bounties, the rules and the strictures of the world that the Lord has made. Globes hanging next to each-other like globes of Chinese Lantern Flowers, like the stained-glass window interiors of snowflakes under the microscope, like seeing the universe in a grain of sand.

"Write!" the Lord says to me, and I write, out of the saddened world, the gladdened world, and all who are kin to me, the chattering neighbours communing at the temple.

Papaya trees with ten pointed, fractalkine, elephant ear leaves, lined with yellow veins and streaks among the emerald green. Dry whorls of branches alighted on the cement platform, canna plants, buckets of garbage and a metal cot with cotton wool and quilt beddings lying on it, wasted, cast out, getting wet in the rain, soggy and damp. How wasteful is that?

Chains of people, inter-linkages of communication, lines of talk and work; we call the nearby homeless/beggar shelter, and inform them of the stock. They are happy to accept, but provided we bring the goods to them on our own; so, we strap and wrap the bedding in a plastic sheet and put it into the car we drive, and head to the place to deliver the goods.

It is necessary to imagine and act, but also to meditate and sit quietly by ourselves a time, to sense the presence of the divine."

"The floor was patterned with diamonds and flower, buds and fruits, gemstones of a hexagonal shape and a paisley arch to encompass the pattern, an Islamic arch in which the pietra dura was set.

The snail was sheeling and turning ecstatically on the brown stones beneath the building. Its glistening wake spread out behind it as a trial of glum glitter – there was no reason to be glum: the sun was shining, the clouds were blowing in great puffs of air and movement, coiling like chimney smoke or dragon's breath, or curving potato leaves curling in on themselves as they trail from their plant tub.

But then, a stupid girl came and stepped on the snail by mistake, and the snail was hurt. Her mother told her she had better kill it, to put it out of its misery. Was that right? She refused. And her mother killed it.

The injustice of one set of big creatures being able to call the shots and not even seeing when a small, needy creature needs to be avoided being stepped on for survival, is just appalling.

Why are we masters? Or are we really? Are not the servants the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven? And will not the Lowly be brought to exaltation and the high and mighty, brought low? Are these not the decrees?

I thought I was good. But I'm not. Only Jesus, who has died for all humanity's sins, can redeem me.

And Ahimsa, or non-violence, is the best doctrine ever. Therefore be conscious of all living beings at all times and be careful."

Dancing under the deep blue sky, shaded with swan's wing feathers and grey gosling down, feathered webbed feet and honking horn, the climbing cumulus, the rising drifting cloud, staring into the boneless ciel, studded with stars, telling stories, feeling the currents of the power and the sway of possibilities within.

"The sky is a rope-ladder of dreams," she says.

"I don't believe you," the other says.

"I believe that if you keep staring and staring into the sky that it'll lead you to answers, ideas and questions you'd never have imagined before," she says.

"Like how people manage to work on only one meal a day,"

"Or how people communicate with their families when they're thousands of miles away, having migrated for work.

"Like how parents love their children despite their faults."

Like how lovers know after they meet, whom they are looking for."

Like how fish and birds find out the place by swimming and flight, where they hatched from their eggs and were born."

"Flicker, Snicker, Bold and Bicker

Bright quartz shine and mountain shiver

Under the full moon large and slivered

Something ragged this way comes!"

"Or how strangers somehow become friends."

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The crystalline peaks of the Hindu Kush and the neighbouring mountains catching the shifting threads of the sun in the loom of the sky, like heaps of red rice winnowed by the woven threshing basket, wrapped and readied by grasses and strips of bark and dried leaves.

Sand baked houses, made of bricks of sun hardened mud, built in doorways with the keystone at the head of the arch.

Settlements of scores of such houses, clinging to the sides of the mountains, as there is safety in numbers, dotting and peppering the cliff-side like handkerchiefs on a pile of day clothes, flanked by

olive trees and bending eucalyptus and orange shrubs lending their green happy tumbling foliage to the ruffling, romping winds that scoured the mountain face.

Keeping the lives in balance, the threads of the loom, the strings of the dream catcher, the ribbons strewn by the wind from the gnarly trunk of the tree, to which they are tied, tossing and wheeling like a whirling hubcap from the arms of a child, frisbeeing, casting a boomerang with the sleight of the hand mild.

"Wresting governments from theocratic control, back into acrobatic patrol," the American soldiers had joked. "I don't like that statement," Shiela said calmly.to her sister Yasinia as they passed. "Islam, administered by Sharia is the way we have been for the past 1,400 years. Why should we accept a foreign yoke?"

A fine tracing of a brown, wrinkled, work worn hand. Mehendi etched on a palm. Long, blunted, ragged nails.

This is the hand of Yasinia, it washes and rinses, and squeezes cotton clothing. It stretches ropes and strings out from the windowsill to window sill in the cold wind, for hanging up of the wet, cold steaming, streaming laundry.

She was thinking of how her Indian friend, Bhawani, had told her of how the Rani of Jhansi' s faithful afghan guards had helped her remain sovereign from the Bristish.

And with Regards to the Anglo-Afghan war of 1870's, how the history text book described it, "MacNaughten's cheery trustfulness, Elphinston's bodily and mental decay, Shelton's stupid willfulness, chronic dissensions between civil and military powers, Sale's withholding of timely succour; all conspired with Lord Auckland's half measures and ill-timed economies to work out a dramatic nemesis of an enterprise begun in folly and wrongdoing.

Dost Mohammed had every right to enter into an alliance with Russia. The British government had no right to protect against it.

"Come, take this amulet," Said Yasinia to Laila. "It is a cotton string tied with drying leaves and flowers that give fragrance, wear it, before it withers."

"Thank you," said Laila.

"You will not fight with flintlock guns, or anything that grazes or pierces. But will fight with soul force, the only true moral power in this universe."

***

Speak, know, understand! There are spells and then there is silence. In order to feel, you must know. In order to know, there must be a still pool. For that still pool the empty yawning of the universe's start. I wouldn't know, for that depends on where thou art?

And thy said, for everything, there is a reason. Samaira walked about in buttercups, sturdy legged, breeze tinkling and ringing. The seal that is nearest our skin, the wound or weal that is closest to the quick, that which seems closer than the veins in our neck, to be cartwheeling, pinwheeling, through the air like leaves in a tumultuous gust, whirlwind, a tornado, love opens up for knowledge, and knowledge opens up for consciousness.

The shirk was so strong that the clothes seemed blowing about in the tempest were as a flame, as they emerged and worked, they seemed to fly about the scaffolding sure. The raindrop like a diamond of dew, its path like the fall of an arrow true, or the arching of the sky blue, so glass clear that a bird could fly straight through. Scarping by, cantering through, a horse trots, a boy rode.

Fire and gold and russet glancing/Through her hair like sunlit rivers,/Meet the clouds that curled and promised,/Rain would quench and bless with shivers/For tis heat and cold doth coax with wail/Through waul, its dew, from earth's green braes, when dawn's fire pierceth dark with day,/quiet, quiet, the ravens whisper,/Let not nearby dwellers know,/When rainclouds and the fire conspire/To make the willowy arbours bow/With harvest's hull and ripening.

I saw their tryst, I saw their turning,/ Silent though their feet did pass/Through the autumn's whorl and burning/They left no hoofprint's through the grass/She gasped, she saw the shape advancing/Cloaked and visored, no, not clothed, /But shrouded in the mist most awful,/Like a dweller from a tomb,/She said, o, what shall I offer but my maiden innocence,/My youth, my toil for thee, waste through work and live thus chaste? Like my mother that bore and broad me, I wring my hands with wrack and toil, and soothe your fevered brain and gather your burning cheeks in my cold mantle. Where fore dost thou rail? See the cool black mud? That is my palm. The whirling weeds my skirts. Come into my arms, like tendril winds, ragged mists we'll dance.

The point was, she was now fixed. They had her now, they had her so.

Love, come thou in transformation, in rapture from the beating, the throbbing cataract of seconds, thrilling and rocking the pulse of silence from another face beheld another's thoughts apprehended, though no word be spoken. Hear our singing, hear our longing, "We will go home across the mountains," Rahim Khan was one such dreamer, the yarn between his knees sat spinning. His hand upon the head of a gosling, gave it flight as he asked God's blessing. The lost lamb kindled beneath his finger, its eyes kindled, it knew where to seek its mother.

Back in the inn, how sometimes the most brittle things, the wings of a bird, the edge of a nail, hold the charm of a snare, of a ring in the arched nostril of a girl. Young men eating together in good company, jovial, their pythonic arms braced against foaming mugs and hard stew, earnest, begging mischief in their eyes, his back and ache, tautened chords of fire waiting for the coolness of the night's hard ground.

And the diners are gone. Girl's feet caress the earth in a swivelling dance, a care to keep the jars of water from spilling over, an earthly nodding cadence, the billowing of the sea's rhythm, pulsing twin of the sharp clear contemplation of the awakened one.

Discipline thyself! Draw thy spirits up in the tautness of thy labouring sinew, for it is thy salvation

And swan-necked maidens, flamingos of glee, carrying pans

To produce the poem of wakefulness,
Of dissent, of hard, ductile tenderness,
Deeper than water
Seven and twenty miles from shore
The speech of business, that is the speech of the soul
Upon occasion, keep awake!
She with the free mind, unfettered vision,
Caring but that she does right
When will the wounded heal? When will the anklet break?
When the wrists are encircled by moonlight
And the night steals the fever with these soft hands like flowing river water.

Yes, I have a tongue, and a sharp one, too, one that can excavate and enlighten, both challenge and heal, question and inform, lead us to a true conversation, a communion, a mutual reconfiguration of our realities, as mine intertwines with yours.

Listen to the children's voices, for many of them know what is right, They will teach you what is good for your soul. They know the god of freedom that soars, walks and rests even in the mortal frame, and how to keep him there. They know that fear itself is to be feared, if it be not the fear of his punishment. They are singly bent on their goals, their parents care for them and how to match up to it, how to be loyal to their friends.

When you are hungry, you must retain him within you, when you are content, he has taken you to his bosom/ has taken you within him.

Did you know that food gives you knowledge, that immediately after your last morsel, you use the remains to write your gratitude that the food will be enough? Know, when he has given to you, and when he has with-held, and for what reason, so that you may be called back to him when the time comes. Know when he calls, upon you to give, and be grateful when you are given, so that you may be content, and have wisdom and blessing therefrom.

And in the pigeon-shed, reaching into the vault of heaven, painted blue and hung with pearls and indigo, that's where we'll go.

Making the treehouse: vines and grasses fringing the shutters and wringing in the doors." Hey, now, mister washer, slip your hand in mine, and thank you for your time, I see the sun behind the clouds. Hey, now mister brother, can you hear the sun shine? Its gold ring in your ear and it bounding like a lime/steaming chime/rhymes.

And my ornaments are the bracelets of sunlight, and my necklace the pendant of heaven/ the net of stars. My garments the magnetic haze of dust, polarised by the earth's lodestone. Aurora Borealis that shines with a thousand colours of violet, blue, new rose and glowing pine green, rippling as its axis turns it face to the bright light of the sun! Ruffling and blowing like a torrent of water, like a cascading waterfall, like the billowing hood of a rippling snake.

The newspaper from the nearest town says that in India, a young Muslim boy was allegedly beaten up on Thursday, by the relatives of a tribal girl he was seeing romantically. He died a day after. The four accused were identified as Ajay Vasava, Vijay Vasava, Akshay Vasava and Dinesh Vasava, all residents of Boridra village.

In order to prevent any further untoward incidents, police personnel were deployed in large numbers in both villages. They said the 18 year old youth of Dharoli village was in a relationship with a girl from the neighbouring Boridra village. The parents and relatives of the girl were allegedly against the relationship, and had put pressure on her to end it.

Although the four accused had been rounded up, they had not been arrested yet. Deputy superintendent of Police LK Zala, said, "in the past one month, the girl had stopped meeting the boy, and this might have driven him to Boridra village to meet her. Her relatives found her in the village, and beat him up with wooden sticks and rods. The official added, we will not spare anybody, whosoever he may be."

And, plying a suburban street in an industrial city of the same country which seems to hate people of our kind, was an autorickshaw driver, someone who drank because no one cared. And lay drunken and writhing because people were too afraid to rescue him.

Maybe he wanted a job where he could read and write. Maybe a girl to accept him. But no one bothered to teach him as a boy, nor to train him to pray.

He could sew caps for a living, or he could weave, mend. But no one would throw him a pittance, and so he got into driving. And when the dizziness of going on the road got too much, without talking to the people he drove for, who left him as soon as he brought them to their destination, he hit the bottle. If he had tried to earn otherwise, no one would have thrown him a pittance, at least not one he would have had to climb down to scoop up and fetch out of a well, as if he were a scavenger, a vulture, a crow or a hyena, scrounging for succour.

But he was an auto driver. And one day the air pollution, the traffic cops, whistling at street corners, the heft of metal and rubber and screeching engines, it all became too much for him. His friend poured him a drink into his tea cup.

Now, he was glad, because someone had saved him. Two women, had spotted him, his head dangling out of the floor of his rickshaw, and two policemen had spoken to him, and set him upright, so that at least he had his head up and could mutter to himself.

And tomorrow, he decided, he would be fresh and not touch drink again.

So, you see how the acts of compassionate women have the power to put a person back on the right track again.

So, they held the mirror to the sun and then to the earth, bouncing off light and darkness for the others to see while they sang.

"The Ladakhi village girl is bold,

And she will act for the good of her family

She considers herself part of their integrated whole.

She is crafty, she is natural, she is innocent

She gathers wild turnips and manioc

In her woven basket, bending her back to dig with a short stick and stone shovel.

Her implements are rude, her face weathered, but she will give a slap in the face to anyone who tries to sell her a metallic shovel, mined from God knows where making a hundred percent profit on her giving up a day's meals just to invest in it.

It is made of wood and attached to a carven stone by rawhide strips,

Wound around it like tendrils of ivy-twine and Orion's sturdy belt, ringing with the swords of patience, hard work expending brute force of one's body, and intolerance of any sort of tyranny.

But she, their older sister, will not let war ravage her brood of brothers,

Nor let them be tempted to run off for a soldiering.

She lashes them tightly to the ground like blasting peanuts and watermelon vines,

Ordering them into the fields as she leads them, her shovel slung over her shoulder, like a bear slung with the skeleton of an animal she has eaten,

Saying their old parents cannot be fed without sweating and honest toil of their grown-up children.

"Safia!"

Her friend of many summers from across the border comes to see her and exchange news to give her seeds that she can plant, and she in return will give her seeds of the pomegranate to place into the other girl's pocket, hanging from her girdle.

"By his grace, your harvests have replenished my stock," she says to her friend, as she visits her as she teaches the village children their letters in the open air, writing the alphabet on the blackboard of the brown dust, that is swept clean every now and then by lashing winds.

Her friend and she look after the children, telling them stories of furry animals and showing them how to wash their hands in the fountain of dust (there is no water) before they say their prayers.

"The luckless giant,' she says. "Was sitting crying under the sycamore tree waiting for something. His hunting was failing. Thus, he was always hungry. A hungry giant is a dangerous thing, but perhaps not one who is always lame.

Then, one day as he had set a fire to warm his cold and hungry hands staring at the shapes that rose in the flames like a play of actors at a theatre telling him he had better curl up on an empty stomach, and the smoke that arose from it, like free and mingling spirits, now dispersing, now tangling, telling him his end was near. He raked the wood with his clawed hand in despair and wailed, coming to rest at the foot of the fire, sobbing.

"Oh, God, why have you forsaken me? Will you help me? I want to live and do your will."

He felt a round, solid fruit at the bottom of the ashes, steaming and sizzling in the cinders. It was a potato, and a useless lump, a lumbering shapeless blob of no-one knew what. But when he brought it out of the fire, he saw it had eyes, was charred black with wrinkled skin, and seemed soft and edible. His last chance at life. He wiped his tears, a sudden hopeful fresh smile on his face. Murmuring and whispering a prayer of gratitude, he took a bite. How heavenly! Just some salt would make it simply divine. He returned to the salt lick that the deer used and scraped some salt from it into a jar. He sprinkled some over the potato and let it roll in the salt on the ground. Of course, if he could find others under the ground, he would not go hungry.

Resourcefulness is the mother of provision.

Today, potatoes are grown throughout the world because of that one giant's resourcefulness, and supplants a fourth to fifth of the starch intake of many groups of people.

Do you know what hard lives Muslims have to live in other countries because of their religion? …

When they move form rapidly disappearing silt islands called chars on the delta of the Ganges, and Brahmaputra in India, and move to the North, that is Assam, they are stereotyped as lungi wearing, thin, short, dark, bearded, vegetable and fish selling "miyas" Muslims with a funny religion and even funnier attire, who come to prey on welfare funds compiled by the taxes of hard-working Assamese city people, always bewailing and bemoaning their fate.

But do you know what "Miya" actually means? It means companion, friend, accomplice, comrade. Those Assamese mainstreamers don't know the full meaning or connotation of Miya, and misconstrue and distort it to have a meaning the ugliness of which reflects back on their own unkindness and sense of superiority. Rather, Miya, is the epithet given to a person one has shared in spiritual experiences or visions with, or with whom one has travelled, or even one with whom one has done business. Whom does Allah exalt? Is it those who, secure in themselves, want nothing and yet project themselves as more valid, more worthy, more deserving citizens than those who are weak with hunger and are willing to lift any burden for the rich, to earn a living for themselves?

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In the path of the Kurds

Trails of un-skimmed milk fresh from the udder,

Rain and mud, wood, chocolate, coffee, cardamom

Riverine veins of porphyry,

And copper nitrate, cobalt blue,

Tracing her fore head through,

Her cheeks like cherries, apples, plums,

Her teeth like pears, like ivory dice,

She whispered and lead her sheep and her little sister through the valley, slipping on slippery mossy stones, skirting around yawning caves and picking dazzling rocks from the bottoms of smiling stalagmites of the dripping geological curtains.

"Sheila, be sure you keep saying the prayers and doing what it is in your destiny to do."

Her bright hair peeping through the netting,

Like cheeping sparrows, pheasants, bulbuls,

Fluttering, breezing in the sun heated mist,

Weaving pathways of fairy tern's feet,

Which turn like wheels and spools and spokes,

And even rolling barrels, generating power

Under the cascading waterfalls.

Black and golden, silver and grey and brushing

In networks of fishermen's twine.

Whorls of branches, the lines of sunlight shining on a brook

Through a forest canopy.

No more heated baths for you, her mother chided. It uses too much wood to warm it, and what's more makes you breathe heavily and walk far too fast for the rest of us.

Avan had been thinking, it was time to give up hot baths for the fasting season. She wanted to see her Nuristani friends again one last time before she packed up and left and was sent off, but knew that they were already too far from the village.

And so, she comforted herself, with the words

Oh, weeping willow southern grown

Grow your branches coiling to embrace my people

So that they may grow stalwart and strong,

Cleverer all the more to find

Your sweet etchings, secret messages

Hidden in the rings of unfelled saplings,

In the un-cloven wood of the turned sod,

In even the fallen logs in which termites swarm.

"Lord knows, it is hard for friends in the springtime, when their people must each go their own ways, seeking bread and fodder."

"Keep your grief within, and nurse it like the sun nurses a sapling to grow towards the rays peeping from behind the clouds."

"When you walk" said her mother, "You should watch infront of you, and should take in the sights of the swirling world with its boughs of clouds and of streaming roofs, its spires of temples and churches and mosques, the dome of its sky against which eagles crows and storks trace, the roofs of wood, corrugated iron, the stock tables on which the day's ironing is done, children playing catch in the dusty lit square of the cross roads, the mystics meeting on the harsh stones behind the village, walking on nails, swallowing fire, sitting in the sun and walking barefoot on sharp shards. They sway as though their swinging, singing souls are free upon the sky in the wheel of the curving bows, scraping the clouds, the balcony railing of the rising houses, soaring like jutting cliffs, around which smoke plays hide and seek, in the *basti.*

Avan and her small sister, steps lithely on the ice, fording the gushing stream, her back and chest strapped with clothes and vessels, tent cloth and spools, darting against the widening distance of patched farmyard quilts and soaring mountains, winding trails beset by clouds.

Her family follows. She is the scion of her mother, who will look after them all when they are tired, for though she eats little, she never gets so. She holds her tiny sister's fingers tightly through the journey, sometimes picking her up and carrying her in her arms.

***

Winding, winding over the rolling hills

Climbing, climbing over the leaning mountains

Sliding and sledding and skiing in the snow,

Watching the dark bark of the scrubby trees etched against the white blanket of ice

And the thin, pale green blades of grass

And mild, delicate crocuses

Peeking up through the drift

For deer to nibble on and be nourished.

This is the stained-glass window image of winter, what joy then, would the sight of spring be?

Rolling, rollicking colours, trees and bushes, full to bursting with shining, waving green leaves, laden branches of flowers, streams that have forded the barriers of ice, flowing in great clamouring whirlpools and winds that blow like rakes through fallen leaves, chilly, sharp, keen.

Whorls of dried grasses, curling in the slopes of summer, gathered into bales for cattle feed, seeds popping in the heat, rain fast, cooling, wetting the straw of cottage rooves, causing it to burst its cellulose casing and grow bulkier. Gusts of breeze chilled by needles of hail, the cheeks grow red like ripe peaches in its chafing passing.

Sheila's crying throat was obsidian dipped in dark water and her forehead the beach brown sands of the scratchy catty pea-nut, strands of hair flickering, chasing one another, in-front of her wrinkled, etched cheeks, cheeks coloured with the tint of red sequoia wood, rosy with a flush of red grapes, or ripened red delicious apples, but melted and burned by tears at the departure of her friend. Crinkling

with the squinting of watching a horizon, upon which stars set, and the magnetic lights of Aurora Borealis turned. Otherwise wide eyes, arms of carved alabaster jug dipped and darkened with characters painted in Chinese ink.

"I shall run to the next mountain," said she to Yasinia. "I shall careen across the hillside with no goats and back, and freshen my mind for reading."

She ripped off her hijab from her teary jewel studded face, and began walking slowly at first, her arms leading her like a mist flowing down the ravine, and then picked up her pace, walking briskly and dove into running, hurtled into sprinting. Her chest heaved and her heart pumped with grief the good blood into her extremities, refreshing her with fresh oxygen like eucalyptus trees respiring and at play in the saucy winds, the lashing rains.

She told herself:

"She is the wind in the sails of night, the quickening breeze in the hollow bamboo flute, the air in a chicken's wing-bone, the springy feather of a gosling's down."

She is the speed in a deer's thin legs, in the rhizomes of grass that spread across the steppe like wildfire, the twine in the teeth of a goat, the springy gait of a lion, you are the speed in the quicksilver's bouncing light, the trick of thought, the dash of a butterfly's wings against the cocoon, the flutter of a moth against the flickering light."

And she received answers, too.

"You are the butterfly catcher, the kind pollen it sniffs in the glade …

The brook's spate, carrying the bubbles of happiness on its flow, the guiding map of the forest, the simple compass of arrows, the cliff's echo, leading me to interpret my own lonely words with the originality of your thought in the silence that underlines each reflection."

(Put more about meaning and memories.)

Although they had talked about their respective traditions, they had avoided fighting about ethnicity, (you need to make this more complex) the adder's sting on the ankle, although the mosquitos had bit them thickly, they had avoided the bruises of falls, although they had grown thin and wiry with walking. They had known the veils of the sunlight, the protection of the force fields of friendship and devotion to the Giver of All Things Good, they had known the intoxicating scent of blue vine flowers casting seeds upon the air from the net walls and arbours of the poppy fields.

This way, thought the girl, I adhere to the running like a limpet, that clung to an undersea rock, a rappeler clinging to a climbing rope hanging from the edge of a steep and chalky quarry, or a rider who clings to his horse's neck when she trots or gallops across a wasteland, kicking up quartz and dust; I shall run every-day," she thought. She did grow stronger and stronger as the weeks went by, and her lungs hale and hearty and her brain flexible, empowered with metaphor and capable of scrawling poems on the empty alternate pages of her Quran,; a power like that of a servant of djinn, who confines himself to one chalk drawn triangle on the floor and becomes master of a genie; for Sheila for a while became the slave of restlessness, and reading and reflection so that she could trace within herself the birth of the genie of independence within, of the finding feeling, when she had met, the full cared for feeling when she had known Avan who understood her dreams as if they were hers, Avan's own, and the choking wauling when she had had to part from the girl she had met first on that misty mountainside to graze their livestock.

***

Jeans, powder blue, sky hued, berry juiced, jamun purple. A sky bringing many storks, in clouds and flapping flocks, heralding bad weather. The air beneath their wings stirs into gusting winds. Sands fly up in their behest, grating sands, that chafe against the skin.

Golden, copper, bronze. Those are the colours of the desert having eroded from the red granite and quartz chalcedony of the mountains and the basaltic plateaued hillside.

The reaper girl, with a crown of light above her messy hair, straggling in the sun and breeze, reaches forwards to pull a sheaf of wheat from the fields as she stands in between one furrow and another. Her bare brown feet grip the dark earth. She feels a current of strength and spirit course through her arms, chest and the back of her head as she works through the mandala of emergent spirit, the aura subsuming her and the wheat crop.

Sometimes, when she is unhooking a bedsheet from the line, or manoeuvring the windows, she feels the same guttering wind of spirit, flapping and unfurling in-front, the call of the beyond, the divine inner world of strange forces and imperatives.

The imperative to go with the flow, to do things, tasks in a harmonious manner according to what has been done before, and the time of day.

Aside from professing one's faith in the one and only God, harmony with the flows is the next most important thing, aside from productive work.

Success in work and relationships emanates from this. In some people's greed, they go against the flows because they think it'll make them rich, and does them great harm.

***

What is summer? It is a bonfire the colour of orange leaves, a cool mountain spring, trickling down the sun-heated rocks, steam evaporating from their wet sides. It is the grasses of the planted fields, sown in spring, overgrowing, their seeds popping in the blazing sun. It is the morning mist clouding the entire field, seeping in from the nearby marsh.

It is bulrushes growing with cattail stamens on the banks of the winding rivers and canals of fields, choking them so they have to be gathered for cow-fodder.

It is the languor of the goats in the afternoon after they have finished grazing and want to be able to walk home to their evening shelter with unpainted wooden slats for rafters, traced with curves of growth lines for every year of monsoon and scarcity of rainfall.

It is the parched thirst of the cracked hard, red ground, for the torrents of monsoon's grey cloud pitcher drops, even for the hail that melts as soon as it cracks on the sun heated earth.

***

I surrendered my hurts and the Lord blessed me.

We watch a world made, built from many strange material; many hues and colours, winds, shapes, breaths and textures.

A blue umbrella, held against the greying sky. A disc of molten silver, the moon, slides like a host behind the clouds. The blue throat of Shiva is the abalone cobra that rears his head, hissing, its coils wrapped around Shiva's tresses, which stems the rushing snowmelt of the Ganges, spilling from the glaciers. India is a very spiritual land.

A red man, in black shorts and yellow shirt, pushing on a cart to transport the collected garbage to the truck that would transport it away for raddi-recycling or to the landfill. With a toss of his head,

he flicks his long black hair over away from his forehead as the sweat drips from his brow to the tarmac floor.

It may be spiritual, but it relegates very hard labour to some who have no advantage in the system.

His wife with the speckled brown and white kerchief, shows him how to sort the banana peels and mango skin from egg shells, date pits and plastic curd containers, metal paper clips and electricity bills.

Dance hurts, and reality can be painful.

Take refuge in your own understanding of what is right, in order to determine what you should do. 'Buddhamg, Sharanang, gacchami, sangham sharnang gachhami, dharmang sharanang gachhami,

And then there are the suttas, the things that the buddha spoke, read them and you will be freed. The principle of right livelihood is quite strong, and then what you are talented at and enjoy doing.

Dolma dries the Yak's strong, thick, creamy yellow and beige milk into cheese, in aluminium pans in the blazing afternoon sun on the terrace, where she keeps knives, sickles, hammers, and tongs, sheep's wool blankets to dry in the summer when they are not needed, which she withdraws into the house when the summer rains arrive, to keep them from getting drenched and remaining damp the whole monsoon season.

This is so different from Samira's terrace, which looks out across the rickshaw, bicycle and care lined lane, to the market on the other side, composed of derelict, half-built buildings, covered instead by corrugated iron or tin, by the thick, blue plastic sheets, painted a lime green or whitewash colour of chuna. There, salesmen weigh produce with rusted iron weights on weighing scales, selling fish, eggs, bread, butter, spinach, bitter gourd, louki, and chicken, toothpaste, towels, combs and sweaters.

If Dolma were to visit Calcutta, surely she would be amazed but stifled at the closeness of everything.

Aref, sad too, sang the song Avan had taught them both on the bazooka. "Lanterns, neon curtains, glow worms of delight; clouds scudding, skies flowing, mountains split with light/clouds roiling, rivers coursing; rise and fight; velvet shining forest stones are wet with water's flight/Touch like quail's wings fluttering, the feathers on a pipe.

Aubergines aglow, pumpkins, squashes, hollow, peering out with eyes, carved out by a sharpened knife that shines with keenness nice/stoking a central mountain fire that swarms with moths and lice,/The knives they prise and sting your eyes till ice and wind are one,/ the coursing glacial alpine flow that graze in mountain laps.

Lattices and laces and snowflakes net and trellised, embossed by twisting whorls, and leaves that curl, and leap like waves, the spools of spider's webs and trails of snails, and glistening dawn's bright dew, shine like diamonds and conspire to flare and brighten, spew.

It was the groaning mountain pine that stoops and groans like yew,/It was the glowing moon's bright shine that sweeps caressing glass, the icy rippling lake of whales, where dives the mermaid lass. And there I met and wed her, the maid of lake renowned, where dolphins leapt and whale's fat fed, and pigeon's furry down. And there the storks bereft her, her cap of curly mown, till herons' feet and mantles heat, their songs of oats wild sown.

And as I slept she touched my head, and I felt her spell on me flown, that wherever I wished to make them bloom I could but whisper songs/ that they'd raise their heads and grow, their shoots and roots like sickling moons,/ to raise the soil and bless the toil/of scatterers that had them sown.

And weet the beat of the duck's ivy's feet, and creepers and trumpets of glory, the soft, blooming iris and dewy lily, / and seeded ferny fronds, like maiden's hands, trellised with henna, the bubbly stream's gleam hath, the water's swathe, of lapping waves and bobbing pine cones. Bouncing like bobs or catamaran corks, and buoyant branches, oak's bright wood on rushing foam,/ a five finger pentacle leaf,/ a glistening star and maple's spar of trickling sweetness, /for there I'd roam and run in the loam,/ of the lasting isle of Iverness, soil, bread of crumbling blessedness, /That bleed and dewed and dropped/ flair blots of trailing gossamer tunnels, of bursting briars and bracts. Nothing is fixed, but everything known, we are to heaven flown, in that small thimble of river water, weave them all among the threads that fall from her twisting hoary laughter.

The eagle's wings spreading and spanning the iris bowl, the wedging mountains walking, crusting, running with tears of sorrow, spangled powdered diamonds glistening in a cave."

Aref now added his own spin to it.

"Her red hair flaming like the plumage of a parakeet, blowing strands and braids and flays,/she flows like a breeze and follows me all through my days,/like a lantern lily burning is she/With rivers in her eyes,/the blue corn-lotus-mussel-periwinkle of Northern blazing skies.

I linked my hands within her own, they plaintively did rest,/upon the stark and starving bones of her poor thin ragged chest,/ and her auburn hair it curled/some grime upon her neck of pride, I said to Caliphurnia,/You're a willow for a bride."

"Check yourself, Aref!" snapped Sheila, scandalized. "Mind your language. I'll best you with mine."

"The wind chimes were like her voice, mellow and ringing, Her eyes were like emerald fishes, darting and flirting, waving fins, her lashes winking. She's like the breeze through a window frame, guttering, sagely, a winnowing, whistling wind, a zephyr and a cresting wave, a ripple and lambs' fleece,/She's a swaying threaded cloth that flies on butter and stirs the nectar of the lees,/She's the sweltering fragrance of the dust that shimmers on the breeze,/that feeds the rainbow foraging bees,/she's the smoke of ice and quenches sleet to slush, that congeals from drifting air, afreeze."

A buckskin goat's wool, gunny, jute sacks, clothed his frame from shoulder to calf, his belt at his hip sheathed in a steel cave, upon which the wind blent and sparks drave on to forge his plow of his wheat sowing, "Excalibur," turned in the dirt.

The sun was rising, fine and beautiful, …"

"Aref and Sheila, I'm putting out the candle. It's time to sleep now." Yasinia nodded. "We appreciate your memories and everything, though we need quiet. You can sing about the sun tomorrow, when it actually rises. Hopefully, it will."

"God causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, the beautiful … And surely, there must be something wrong, in trying to silence any song."

***

A sweeping tuck, a laughing leap, a careening turn, and open arms. Calling, evoking, proud, graceful peasants dancing, a scuff, a hop and leap. Wheedling, turning, winding, lunging, springing upon a balancing beam, like a gleam of sparks, a butterfly, a moth, a simple heron.

Singing, belting out verse like a cheerful milliner piping a flute to the health of his friends when he grinds the grain of his customers, wind whistling through his teeth.

Sitting with his sister of an evening, telling, chatting, gabbing.

'Did you hear how he told me, he was bringing clay for me to smear on cloth, is was as if he was proposing to be work partners for my sewing and that he would sell them (coats) for us in the market," said Sheila.

"You had better concentrate on your teaching studies," said Aref succinctly. "Look neither here nor there but climb up the ladder, leap up the gangway."

"I don't want to ignore him. I don't want the army to take him. There are so many boys leaving for the Mujahideen, those who struggle, nowadays. The restlessness of village life, when the Russians are haunting our mountains, is not good for them."

"You have a point."

"What I wouldn't say is that we ought to let the (Shorawi)Russians stay as long as it is their fancy and then let them sidle away from Afghanistan when they are tired of us," said Sheila. "We have no choice but to continue fighting them, although we may win, will only ruin our ranks, our families.

"Look at what is happening in Herat. Are they getting 'tired of us" as you say? How many villages will they turn into craters? How many fields of wheat into landmines? How many schools will they turn into charnel houses? How many men will they turn into bereft souls, robbing them of their wives, their family life, their children, their occupations, limbs and their manly honour? How long will they mess with our family life, our business, our sovereignty and will we just sit by and take it like opium addicts dreaming with rapid eye motion?

"Not you as well. You know that they at least guard the liberty of the working class, the peasants and they might bring industry side by side, so that we can progress as a nation, Aref ... Yasinia and I can't spare you, in more ways than one, and they won't either if you go and fight against them."

Aref let loose a startling guffaw. "Do you know me by now, or do you not? I wouldn't go, leaving my sisters and occupation behind, when there are other ways to battle the Russians. Only their Christian Peasants once knew something of subliminal warfare, *jihad al nafs*, a war with one's own soul which turns into cosmic combat, but their armymen, indoctrinated into godlessness, cannot be said to know. They are nothing but cowering infants, with their fingers in their mouths, or toddlers following their fathers footsteps. And do I think that communism has no place in our country? Is property already tribally owned, a collective enterprise of the generation of wealth? And Alms or Zakat an obligation every devoted Muslim has to pay for the orphan the widow and the destitute? But is it enough? But if we beget socialism, it will be ourselves that must plant its seed in our native soil, and not anyone butting in from the outside. That's my position, and you'd do better to amend yours."

Sheila looked down. 'I see your point, brother," she said with feeling.

"I know you know how to take advice," said Aref firmly. "I wouldn't have spoken if I didn't truly believe in what I say.'

***

Glory Praise and honour

Christ Redeemer, King,

Voices of glad children, made

Hosannas ring

You are the king of Israel

And David's blessed son,

Who in the Lord's name comest

The king and blessed one.

Homaira sat by the fireside, mending her sister's coat, patching it up with old handkerchiefs as it had holes and threadbare patches over the shoulder where the strap of her jhola on market days, and her school bag, on school days, abraided.

Meanwhile, she saw a cat, stalwart and fuzzy, bushy haired, ginger striped and stout, crawling along the border wall/ seat of the garden outside. She reached her hand out of the window and stroked it and relished the feeling of fuzz and bushiness, the soft, feathery fur and the cat arched its back against her hand and purred, feeling the feeling of Homaira's gentle touch.

O come, o come Emmanuel,

And ransom captive Israel,

That dwells in lonely exile here

Until the son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee, o Israel.

I came to thee on a camel's back. And on a camels' back shall I ferry the carpets.

He shall come on a donkey's back.

The other on a bicycle, knowing, and the other not knowing

Oppressed, cheated of their wages,

Making things work for their families,

Through sheer effort, ingenuity, sweat and cunning,

Jesus shall meet him halfway,

And show him, not only how to survive,

But to give himself, and win eternal life.

Do not forget how sheep's wool feels on your arms, the long, soft, woven hair of a pashmina shawl, a Kashmiri Kaftan. Long, woven, shaggy, yellow white, off white, beige, like bad teeth, like musty walls, or like soiled canvas.

And they smell, too, like barns. Half putrid, half milky, sweaty, meaty, salty, full of improvised baaing and sweet railing, bucking against the stable barriers, and nudging against each-other affectionately.

***

A sky, pierced by a derelict roof, so blue and edged with clouds so white, silver lined and fine, lacy, that one would think the sun or the hand of God blazed right behind them, calling walkers to gaze up at it.

A moss covered, derelict building, with iron box grills around its windows, a bushy fountain sprig of bougainvillea flowers growing out of its drain pipe on the third floor.

Use your talents for the Glory of God, when he has need of you. I am grateful to have gone past that house on a side-street. Bless that little boy sitting in the *raddi* shop, looking disinterested in us, hopefully he has had some fun at all.

A weighing scale to measure the mass of discarded paper, plastic and metal and glass brought by people who don't need them anymore. A small, dark room with no door, but a third, entering wall that is completely open.

A place that could be cheerful, but is not. A place that could be welcoming, but at the moment is not. The people who bring their waste don't need to 'sell' it, most of the time, but nevertheless they do. The waste pickers and *raddi-wallahs* pay the owners for the garbage they bring. Is this not an injustice?

***

Lashing rains of salt and pepper colour, clouds blotted with leaking, pouring cotton clouds, and slapping winds.

High on a hill sits a shepherdess, carrying a baby goat. Holding her hand up to her forehead to shield her eyes, she searches the horizons for a cave to which she can take her flock, so they can stay dry.

"Sweet black socks gambolling,

Satisfied with the grass it chews and bleating

Butting its brothers in play and running back and forth,

Sucking milk from its mother, an infant baaing."

"Eyes full of lakes and amber gems,

Sparkling, brown as sunlight on dried grass

Full of friendliness and fun,

Full of starlight and sun, and branches curving

And dividing, speaking of truths sky born.

The watchman, he sits and watches and defends the buildings,

With his honest, cunning eyes and years of experience,

Talking and mingling with all,

And defending the interests of those in the compound.

His masters, those who pay him and those who rent.

In his free time, he washes cars.

Bending and carrying buckets of water,

Scrubbing and wiping his dusty exteriors, shining and clean

We love him and pray for him, he is a saint.

***

When a man comes by with bamboo

On his shoulder, the best you can do

Is scooch up and write, or observe

And feel how the ratty rope is bunched up

The hollow tubes crisscrossed

The bamboo stalk lines meshed against

His shoulder, and how he leans over the other side to keep balance

His neck strained, his knees bobbing,

His feet swinging and grasping the ground.

How does he go for miles and miles

Along a concrete, tar or tarmac road,

With autos plying, buses trundling,

And trucks whizzing and whirring

A lone pilgrim of subalterns,

Whom we recognise as a kindred spirit,

Alone yet not alone, tied by the intanglio of his working body

To those for whom he toils,

His work group, seth and family,

Tied by myriad bonds.

But perhaps you can offer to help him carry it?

***Thank the lord for healing, strengthening. The gypsy girl, autumn's child twirls in place with arms whirling round, her cheeks pinched red, like cherries, eyes focussed upon the tree trunk, her scarlet and leathern brown cloak whirling like falling leaves, the resplendent tresses of ebony falling and flying out in the cold, icy wind.

The banyan tree's leaves, dusty dark green, falling and rising, bobbing with the pelting of raindrops like pebbles being thrown at a wall.

Its trunk and roots, cracking up the wall, and within the shattered cement grows a peepul tree, with heart shaped or shield shaped shining green and reddish leaves blooming one upon another, gleaming in the noon-day sun, its threadlike roots curling and devastating the wall. Yet it was the wall, or rather the dirt between the wall and the road, that gave its seed soil. But walls are never meant to stand forever. This is nature's way of insinuating herself in the stultifying walls of civilization.

***

A journey, a path, gleaming with light

Take it, give it all you've got

Run with your satchel across the scrubbed bricks

A good scholar, a good athlete,

A striving Christian,

What will you do, what will you wend together of the strands of your life?

Grey-blue, cloud coloured, a flash of lightning

A rainbow, delicate jade green leaves rustling

In the wind the colour of water

Ebony black strands of hair and pearly white cloud

Entwine like a grapevine around an arbour

Twirling and delicate, sweet and sour, dripping with sap, vinegar and ardour.

Cloud upon cloud gathers, and still I wait for you

How will I pass my time waiting?

Of what will I think? Of what will I say when thoughts are tumbling over

One another in eagerness to be spoken?

Today, I say to you, be grateful for all you do possess, and thank God for it. Be grateful for every little thing you have. And don't take it for granted. Offer up your work and effort, song and play, for the Glory of the Lord. Do not go back on your decisions to do good.

Like a hen gathers up her babies, the Lord will gather you, if you remain obedient to Him.

Be humble with the humble, and humble with the proud, but do not grovel infront of them. You must defend your interests, set boundaries. Do not allow yourself to be exploited if you can help it. If you are poor, there is no shame in that and you should be proud of what your toil can earn. If you are rich, remember that what the Lord has given you is to be stewarded for the good of your family and that of others. And be glad to eat the food that your fingers have spun or your efforts have helped to grow or raise. Do not enact tyranny over animals.

Examine your goals. Do they align with your faith and values? Do your goals focus your energies in a positive direction?

The Lord has given me so much after I turned to Him. I must share from my brimming barn His gifts that others may be glad as well. Will we follow him? Will it be easy? No. But it will be worth everything, and He will redeem us.

***

A houseboat girl plying her oars on the reflective dal lake, her pink dyed headdress folded as a kerchief around her brown head of hair, which was bushy but braided and twisted into a tiny knot and bunned with bobby pins at the back. Her long brown arms were braceleted with silver filigree, her purple pink kameez embroidered with white thread in a cornucopia of flowers that arced in a diamond shape, like the lattice of prayer shrines, vines tracing, leaves snaking, blowing in patterns and curves like the curling boughs and blossoms of a eucalyptus tree.

Her skin was the colour of brown cashews, weathered and lined, her eyes deep, dark brown, and set like hidden jewels or precious ostrich eggs, beneath her arching brows.

Her body rose and dipped, her back and kaftan rippling as she thrust the oars in and out of water, sending the boat surging slowly forwards towards the shore. The remaining marigolds, jasmines and roses for sale at the floating market today, lay in a still fresh heap, bundle of fragrance and midday newness in the bag at the centre of the boat. She sang:

O, the azure water gently ripples, cascades of waves and foam in calligraphy of poems, writing paradoxes and riddles on the surface of the river, but the truth lies inwards, beneath the surging waves of emotion, currents within, when they match up with or give rise to the words, that's when the unity of the soul and body are reached.

The earth, red laterite, clung to by moss and ivy and vines, little emerald coloured clumps of ferns, with red seeds on the backs of their leaves. The pony says, hitch a hike on my back, with a blanket or a saddle, and I will take you among the towns!

Mussel shells, shrimp, salmon, lobsters, pona fish, halibut, swimming happily and letting their fins or hair wave like a mermaid's tresses in the water, all playing and spurting and leaping with their friends. Their shells of mustard gleam purple, blue, greening emerald, brown the silver of a steel one rupee coin, built up by the trusty men of farms, the building of wealth from bottom up, from the foundations of society.

Keep a diya, or a lamp, or lantern, lit within your heart for all the lonely people and exploited workers of this earth, that you may give them succour and company when the time comes.

***

One day, a tailor's boy decides he wanted to fashion a peacock's feathery train out of leaves and cloth. First, he fetched a piece of white cotton to funnel the train. Then, he looked for threads and a needle to sew them to the cotton train. Soon after he had fetched them, he searched for fallen jackfruit tree leaves to form a dark-grey green background, reddening yellow maple tree leaves that smelled of apple syrup, or grape juice, marigolds to form the yellow orange eyes of the peacock feathers, and iris forget me nots to form the blue portion heart of the eye.

It was so beautiful that the deer mother desired to buy it for her daughter Tehmina doe's wedding. She asked the tailor boy if he would sell it to her. "only if you bring me a piece of pure moss that I could make a kaftan with from the glade of open grass at the center of the forest. There is a rock cavern at the bottom of the drop, where stalactites drip their pure holy ice-cold water onto the floor, and there the moss grows, illuminated by the sun at only a few hours of the day, before and after dawn, when all the lazy are sleeping. With that, I will make coats for the badgers. Only if you fetch this for me can I sell you the peacock train.

The tailor boy was always up before dawn to perform his ablutions, cook his breakfast, with his mother, and prepare his cloth and tools for the day, or purchase or source his cloth and the materials he needed for his craft. Today, he woke up extra early so that he could walk with the deer mother to the meadow of the cave in which the moss grew that he would take for payment. But on the way, his tattered clothes got caught in a bush of briars. It being early spring, he dared not remove his clothes lest he be chilled. So the deer mother kindly intervened and said, "I will chew at the bush, remove the snare and free you."

This, she did, and the tailor boy, whose arms were scratched and bleeding, was very grateful. "Let us turn back now," he said. "This was a bad omen of what would happen to me if I took payment for the peacock's train. Although we humans toil for our morsels, we don't understand the meaning of true fairness and reciprocity. If I were to prise apart the moss from the rock of the cavern, I would be taking its life; the peacock train I constructed killed no creature as it was made of cotton and fallen leaves. You have saved my life today and given me clearer inner vision, this is more than enough in return for the paltry decorations of your daughter's wedding."

He could see that the deer were poor and what was more, the words from his mother's Bible: "Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord is the Rock eternal. He humbles those who dwell on high, he lays the lofty city low, he levels it to the ground, and casts it down to the dust. Feet trample it down – the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor. The path of righteousness is level, O upright one, you make the way of the righteous smooth, yes Lord, walking in the way of your laws, we wait for you, your name and renown, are the desire of our hearts."

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Lightning, spindle tailed, blade winged, parakeets; red papaya beaked and bright green, preened, squawking, flying like javelins from the mane of bamboo thickets and coconut palm fronds, over the stirring crimson flowering gul-mohar patches of leaves, across, in-front of the tall buildings, to nose, with sunbirds and pigeons, along with eagles, hawks and iridescent, black plumaged crows and ravens.

The raven says, "I am black, but I can fly and spy rotis left over from a dog's meal, which I will feed to my grateful young and share with my mate. We scale the dizzying heights, the layers of air and wind, the urban heat island effect and its waves, to come and rest and perch on the stony tops of buildings, mountain crags, and the cisterns of skyscrapers, TV dishes, windows sills and grills and curtain poles and pegs.

And I drive my beak into the clouds and my wing feathers; I bring the rainbow morn on the day of thunder, carry the box of colours mown, cut and emanating from the swan feathery wings of clouds and mist, the packed circling cumulus and fog, the choking of hail and fighting sun beams, quarrelling in the bickering light.

Sweet, chittering light and chattering droplets, falling on and shattering the windows of ice, the films on puddles until the air pops with sound.

Behula's slender brown limbs leaping and swerving in a graceful, flamelike dance, bending and swaying like the Tal Gaachh; or palm tree, in the skirting wind, or winging it like pinecones arching over the mountain face when their juniper mothers release them to start their own plants, or like the tall stalks of peepul branches; white, stripped of bark, letting their heart shaped leaves clamour, bright dark green, water pale, sky reflecting, papaya orange, stirring like laughing larks or bouncing sparrows or bounding chickadees, faces of merriment and chatter, resplendent in the afternoon sunlight, near the sea, where the blue opal water mills around the ghat steps and stones, erodes shells and ripples, laughing.

This was her dancing.

Where many dogs roamed and pigeons strutted, searching for fallen wheat scattered there by the well-wishers foraging among the dusty roads and tarmac and brick paths, for twigs of which to build their nests, budding branches discarded by trees, to structure them with circular, spiral walls, deepened by straw and hay to hold the eggs against the vagaries of weather. The roads the village labourers had built with their toil and ingenuity, hired by the central government on MGREGA. The road from Bengal to Afghanistan is long and hard, fierce, blistering, but the hospitality and friendliness of stranger and natural environment makes it possible. This is a story of children half Afghan half Bengali, who grew up traversing this road.

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The horse pawed on the ground and whinnied. Its mane tossed like foam atop an ocean wave, or like tossing silver filigree on the earrings of a barrio-maiden.

"Abba's cashews and keshmesh (raisin) bundles have to be lifted without spillage," Ayesha called out to her brother Aref. "We need some help here." Aref scrambled over and helped her to lift the bundle

along with Ayesha's efforts, lifting the packing case from the blowing dusty ground and steadying the cotton bundle wrapping it with wide jute straps to the gleaming back of the horse.

They loved to run around the sides of the stream, even with its steep and crumbling banks, moss covered, full of choking brambles and honeysuckle flowers and dandelion plants, the clear water spilling, like fishes darting, sparkling, something non-human, non-animal even, a pure, other worldly entity. They skirted the banks of the stream, whose banks crumbled into clods of dirt, up-to the red lava flow ghats, covered with thorn and thistle and peepul and pine, jackfruit and night jasmine bushes and hibiscus shrubs.

We have to keep selling these expensive dried grapes in every town we pass, or we can't eat. And what we earn from its sale and barter, we must keep the profits untouched, and thus, only the simplest food to buy and to cook ourselves, on our camp-fires, is what we can afford to consume and have nourish us.

Ayesha's hair flowed behind her, the strands covering her eyes at times. Aref's brown arms swayed and swung like a trapeze artist's as he walked along the narrow pebble path of the stream. The koel's 'piya-piya' called; almost quenching their thirst and longing for non-familial company on that day.

And they sang that Jesus Christ, he is the font of healing, succour, mercy, the fountain that quenches all thirst, the stream of forgiveness, of redemption that washes away all sin and impurity from ourselves. Springs of clean water arise in the desert and give drink to the casuarina and palm trees, and to water melons and musk melon vines, which grow on the sides of its quenching rivers, speckling the sandy expanses with oases of deep and emerald green.

Spare the Gibeonites and do not make them wood-cutters and watercarriers by heredity.

And on land that is less arid, less infertile, we purpose to grow arbours of grape vines, for our heaps of grapes, mountains of sugar and sun speckled green raisins; and the vines and thorns which we use to burn as a fresh greenwood smoky incense to send the cattle into ecstasy that will keep them walking even on lean journeys. W build the structure, the framework and encourage the vines to grow tangling up the wooden framework into it and over it, send it sprawling like a great jade cloud interspersed with braids of cane and wood.

The water carrier girl, carrying a goatskin in her strong, tanned arms, walks humbly, walks proudly; hair spilling out from her braid in waves, mown hay, spindles and spokes, of silver and gold, like moonlight and sunshine, shining auburn and chestnut, peanut shells, like the igniting of a fire on a green but dry bush, or the sunlight alighting on a tulsi-plant in a mountainous scene, midmorning.

Her green dress, made as though of moss, ivy and jute, in a flowing skirt, mills around her ankles and knees in ripples.

Her face covered in wrinkles, and crinkles, a sparrow-like hook-nose, water and light, a friendly smile, she says: "Freedom is the best gift God and man can give to another, and self -respect the best gift a man or woman can give himself or herself. What you are is God's gift to you, what you become is your gift to God.

Saini, her eyes cooled from the bakhoor and incense she had burned in her small slum apartment, lined with kohl, said, not everyone in the system was born free. It was not God that granted privilege, but man that built it up, law by law, injustice by injustice.

Ajmera, the Anglo-Indian water carrier girl, who also played the piano, harpsicord and violin in her spare time, and taught children how to play them, how to make music from these instruments. Saini

sang in restaurants solo and as a voice accompaniment, with Ajmera playing for her. She paid Ajmera three rupees an hour from the collections of her audience.

“Oh, my land, my land, why do your legitimate children plunder my tenants? Have they not paid their dues? Have they not given their toil to build the bunds around the fields and tilled them?

“And when the pearly drops of tears and rain falling from the witnessing sky, have dried on my face, quenching the thirst of the wheat, corn, rice, oats, flowers, and making them grow, why then do your legitimate children steal their bloom? Their fruit and their grain?

Ajmera was generally happy with what she got, crafty as she was with notes, chords and melodies she coaxed like David the harpist, or Apollo the Shepherd whose flock was protected and drawn by the beautiful combinations of notes which he coaxed from his instrument in the wilderness, meadows and pasture.

“When you write songs,” said Saini. “When you compose them, think always of opposition, contrast, and building of a for-wards going process, and element of synthesis that derives intrinsically from opposites, to trailblaze a unique realization, process or result of the forces that fight or spar with each-other in the first place. Just let the words, phrases and ideas emerge from the fabric of your being, your experiences, your making sense of them.

Both Saini and Ajmera were quick, but Saini the fierier of the two, her wit like a sharp knife on which she quickened, rubbed her words. Saini’s black hair was long and straight, her skin brown like red laterite lava of the western ghats grown over with thistle, furze and sal- shrubs, grazed by speckled fawns and gentle deer. Her voice was a mystery, its source of power hidden, but its power was not always gentle, but truth-telling, honest and brusque.

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A memory. Sheila was just climbing to reach the herb when the rocks beneath her began to give way and she began to fall. “Friend, help me!” she screamed, and immediately she siezed her, Avan put her foot on the embedded rock and gripped Sheila tightly, heaved her onto the path which had not yet crumbled.
“I thank you, thank you,” said Sheila, in scared whisper, and Avan held her close. “I told you sister, don't walk on the edge. Just keep single file, walk behind me, or in front, but not besides, for the path is really narrow, like a hairbend especially round the jutting promontories, round the turn in the mountain’s cylinder.”
“Tell me a story for to forget my fear,” said Sheila to Avan.
“Alright,” said Avan, but she was rattled by the near fall of her friend, who was also in a way her charge, being one year older than her.. She sat down on the grass, hugging her knees to herself, breathing hard and with shock and relief, as well as incredulity at the younger girl.

“Don’t you not know how to look after yourself?” and patted the ground next to her.

“Can orphans indeed look after themselves? Indeed, I must watch better.”

‘Indeed, you must, and remember your mothers and grandmothers watch from above.”

“There was once a girl who had twelve brothers who were swans. Every morning they were called by the west wind to go and honk and graze, feeding and calling upon the hills and when they took flight, whirling among the tall clouds and the purple haze of the chimney spokes and tall spires, among which they tumbled joyfully in the great gusts.

The girl said to her brothers, “Isn’t there any way I can fly with you when the sun rises and we all leave the nest among the rafters?

The brothers told her to cut and fold strands of grass, weaving them into swooping wings. If she slipped her arms into these, like small bracelets or necklaces, when she went out she would soar way above the sails and the highest tree branches and on top of the West wind, surging like a strong goose, swinging like a ladle and cream in a bowl of milk, or the crest of foam on a rising wave of water, the wax of a candle, a stack of straw, the mane and tail of a horse roan flying and flapping like a flame.

She did one day, and what did she see? The chimney tops of all the houses, the stacked tiles and bricks, the slanting shingles of their rooves, their terraces out of which their plants reared their heads, the temple bells and the carts of bullocks, ram-horns, water carriers wending their ways among the narrow streets, wakening with their calls doves perched in trees hiding their heads beneath sleeping wings.

And what else did she see? The tips of daffodils, the spinning wheels of daisies, the whorls of turning jasmines and the twigs of crocuses poking up from beneath the snow, the shining of a smiling sunflower, the ways the dandelions blow.

In this way, Avan made sure Sheila knew that there were Angels who could fly, who would swoop to pick her up, even though she had nearly fallen. And made it clear to her, not to tempt fate, as Satan had tried to convince the Messiah to do, but that Jesus had resisted.

"At the same time, a falling object falls so fast, and water is always falling."

Another day, Avan told Sheila about her own experiences.

"His hair stood up in all directions, because he had been standing on the rock above the cliff, at the crossroads of the winds. His head was like a house, thatched by shifting palm leaves shaking and shivering like lids of tin clattering against each-other in the breeze.

He was an orphan, and he did not have people.

He said: "We should talk sometimes, and we should possibly live together in the future. I bailed you out, girl, and you bailed me out; I feel comfortable when I'm with you, and you feel comfortable when you're with me, it's meant to be.

I nodded. 'Let's see how the living together part goes, I said. 'I don't know if I can find a place big enough for the four of us.'

'I tell you all my people, that the sign has come, and will come, many times for different people and peoples. Sometimes it appears in seemingly trivial things. Hairs in the teeth of a comb, the flippers on a tortoise, the cross etched in red ink on the index page of a schoolgirl's textbook.

And always, stay away from people who do not respect your personal space, whether it be in words, or in physicality. But he, I tell you, he never stood too close, or touched a girl, he was so close to Allah, that his very body was like a mirror, that could assuage anyone's pain.

"And what about you, my dear sister Avan?"

"I will take the hand of those that are sincere."

The pentacle rays of the sun through a window, reflecting on a mirror, and even the coils of a spiral bound notebook, is a symbol of the cross repeated many times along the length of a long edged stiff paper, the meeting and parting of friends.

Make sure that you keep working hard, both before and after the appearance of this sign. This will prove to the lord that you are sincere about earning and continuing to earn your salvation, and working on your conversion, and will help you to discern the reason for the coming of Mary, which was about more than the birth of a son, but about the many amazing miracles they both would

perform together, and enable and lead others to perform as they become holy people, full of light, sacrosanct workers of the sowing and the harvest, seekers of truth, knowledge and grace.

Sheila wanted to hear! She wanted to hear as much as she could of the celestial singing, the birds' crowing, the sun's rising, the hens clacking, the chicks running, the eggs cracking, the milk pouring in the pails from the udders, the water falling, the dishes washing, the clothes a rinsing.

She wanted to feel! She wanted to feel the nerves in the swan's neck, the stiff, fluffy feathers like clouds, the bones of the wings, the flute like beak caressed by her gentle fingers and palms, from which the nasal, rising song calls.

And she wanted to run, feel the wind blowing, pouring into her ears, her forehead, her collarbones, her armpits, it was then that she realized how good it was and what a gift, simple plain porridge without a sweetener, honeyed merely by the touch of her sister's hands and the sour churning skin dissolved of the milk, soft, slimy, silken, mushy as loose soil porous by the piercing rain, reminding herself of the snacks her friends brought to school, of mango flesh, pickles and seeds, tangy sour, orange, covered with a green mud splattered skin, which grows from the white lacy blossoms on large, sinuous, gnarling, water sucking trees."

I said to my friend, said Avan, I'll never leave you, but if it takes me to the bottom of the ocean with a plumbline, to find you a pearl in an oyster shell." And he said, "If you were a fish, I would wrap you around like a piece of kelp, whenever a storm comes, and when you break free you will tear me from the sand bottoms with me wrapped around you like a banner, a ribbon, a band.

"Bandages," the other said, and sank to the earth in a swoon. "To swathe one's wounds, like the sand hides sharks and eels and stingrays, gloaming, writhing, like ticks through the deep.

'Why," said Avan to her friend, "Must friendship never be an end in itself? My, it may lead to learning all sorts of things about the world, but why must a person always be thought of as a means to an end? Our relationships with people, although dynamic, should be valued for themselves. The moment we think of a relationship as only being able to lead one somewhere, of being a stepping stone to somewhere else, that is when we abuse the very name of friendship. At the same time, we must make sure we are going somewhere of our own accord, like you are training for teaching, and I for making ends meet, herding, farming and tending my family's cooking and washing at every point in time."

And all through the Chechnyan trouble, where militant jihadists had sieged a school, and when Russian forces tried to flush them out, the faithful women kept the candles burning at the kitchen stove at the altar. Coral hearth, built up, apple like a pile of stones, eaten over, hung draped like drifts of moths and moss, shattered, jagged stones, some molar, some canine, some rounded, a family, leering sharp like rusty blades about to spar, a carp escaping tyranny. Sagging, steaming turmeric, cinnamon, singeing lime, spouting, slicing clove, scouring, clean, incising.

"you are not a monument of stone, but a human being!

O lord of the springs of life, lead me to knowing."

Tears falling down the long icicle nose and the splashing into the lake, plinketing into the ocean.

And the sky was so blue as to be almost the shattered shard of the petal of a lotus carved of lapis lazuli, flaring turquoise here, burning sapphire there, and throughout its whole expanse, whinging with a sheen of acquamarine brightness, of the scattered rays of a robin's egg blue, enamel, the snows like vows of moonstone flashing in a sun of sparkling question marks, the quest for truth.

Avan paused.

That morning, they looked across the landscape which was shaded and guilded with the melting snows, and swept glaciers, settling flakes and slanting sleet, curved and moulded, carved and soldered, swilling, banking, pouring, shimmying, waist of the motherland pouring into shoulders, shoulders pouring into waist, her legs' rounded calves peaches falling strewn upon the emerald fields of spring, walking together like swirling waves of the ocean, gliding, wending, weaving, her arms swinging as the breezing grasses of May; stirring, whispering, mellow, winnowing, murmuring.

"When I am finished with the story, my dear Sheila, you must go off to sleep. And in one week I shall expect you to tell me a story of your own. It's high time you were progressing to being and thinking and expressing creatively yourself."

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Chapter 4. Making up Stories

A water hyacinth, sheltering dragonflies which spread its pollen among other flowers, petals flowing in the water, loose, bending, easy, airy.

A silver fish, slipping among the stems and roots, cavorting and playing among them, twisting into haloes, loops, rings, hula hoops, jumping like bicep muscles which when flexed, burst their strong bands.

A canoe man and a woman, walking deep in the stream of water, the soles of their feet and toes finding their grip among the gravelly and sharp stones.

Behold your friends and charges,

The cattle, wherein there is beauty for your eyes,

And milk for your mouths and stomachs

Wherein there is fertilizer for your fields

And pesticide, from their urine for your crops,

Wherein there is draught power for ploughing and for taking your produce

To the market, or for transporting people

Remember your cattle always,

The grey, the peahen, brown, dun-coloured

Furry bovines, with ears on the head like perking morning glories

Or kitten's ears, and a wreath of lilies on their heads form their growing horns.

Oh, cattle, chase the bees, run in the grass,

Derive your nourishment from the clovers, or sweet-smelling cows

And wobbly, prancing goats,

Lowing and mooing and baaing, and railing for your shepherd's lead

For the plan of walking the yolk, travelling in a herd,

Milling as cream on milk or leaves

Atop a waterfall's plunging currents

Walking carefully upon the loose chalcedony of the mountain path,

The carven grace of the sweeping dust,

Whittled stone to sand by the treading and trampling of a thousand generations

Of such hooves, cloven and hard and nimble

Their shepherdess with a wonderful soaring voice, low and soothing,

Clear and mellow as cold water, a still pool, or gently trickling rivulets with

Eddies and whirlpools beneath the surface.

"Stirring the wind in sails, love,

Stirring the wind in veils,

Stirring the wings of quails love

Gathering the sea with pails."

Wajma, my sister.

Making words of beauty

Making words of praise

Making words of wonderful description

Making words of communication

The waves upon the ocean, the trees and their fruits and leaves, the light upon the arrows of rain, the spades of branches fluttering in ripples of egrets' air swimming

The moon upon the lake's table, whispering.

"It was not in your destiny to get the box of moving images," Jenny told her friend Jan, the bootblack and ragpicker, doubled up into one man. "Rather, it was your destiny find the twisting cross of rose and thorns on your frozen handkerchief, which you had laid out on the ledge, beneath the bush, in the open.

She was standing with him near the wrought iron gate, hawking fish among the beaten down, weathered and dilapidated huts painted chipping-ly blue, mint green, beige and sorrel coloured.

"I cannot pretend to say I knew,' said Jan the bootblack. "But I am glad to know you are with me in the circumstance."

"Don't worry," said Jenny. "Not having the box of moving images is better for your destiny in the long run. Countless are the number of people who are lead astray by that idiot box, who only want to find out what happens next on screen, but can hardly move along in their own lives, sufficiently, to be proud of themselves for accomplishment. I am happy to have you among my spoils of war against the television tube.

And remember to give thanks to our saviour for bringing us out of the slough of despond and placing such a lovely gift on your handkerchief," said Nollie. "It is as if you went to sleep, crying and woke with your tears turned into rose petals, feather light and dewy upon your cheeks," she finished, happily.

"Even if it were a wan rose, the arrows of the rain from the sky would not harm it, it is so gentle, it stutters and shutters the shocks," said Jan.

"Although we haven't eaten for nearly three days, we hardly feel hungry," the two of them sang, feasting the fabric of their senses upon the scents of the baking rusk bread coming from the Goan bakery across the street.

Jan picked up one of the baskets which they had laid out beside where they were sitting, and stood, hoisting it onto the *pagdi* on top of his head. Nollie did likewise, and they stood, began walking towards the shop door. "Oh, let us eat here, they both murmured. "If it weren't for the muslin cloth in which we've wrapped our chappatties, we would have to walk in and ruin the reputation of the restaurant with the aroma of raw fish!"

Joaquin, the waiter, stood behind the table. His kind face was peering, trying to judge the degree and cause of their hardship. "My dear son and daughter, what will be your order, if I do not presume upon your time?"

"Now that you ask, father, could it be that we merely sit here, and eat the meal we have prepared ourselves? We will sell you our fish in return, if you hope to gain from the renting out of your space."

"I have no objection. Only let me see your fish first, and tell me if it is not partly rotten," said the waiter, sniffing. "Meanwhile, I will bring you water to wash your hands."

Willingly embrace hardship and suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ and join your trials and suffering to his own. Then you will see the harvest with him. But do not work only for rewards, but for the sake of the duty of love and friendship.

A sprig of holly, a packet of lye, a spool of cotton yarn, a pocket full of rye.

Nollie was gazing at a leaf, the dried fronds and furze, holes made by a caterpillar and mouldy stems and edges, beautiful and tortuous jade-coloured veins.

God was watching over us then as he is now.

And he tells us where to go and whom to meet

The books to read and the children to teach

The poems to write, flowing like river water

From the heart of the sacred self-intellect

That mind common to all travellers in the dome

Of the world's great wigwam, yurt or mosque.

Tracing the filigreed carved windows, jharokhe

Sandalwood screens propped up between

Two isles of prayer niches, the carpets on the

Studded linoleum floor, like moss underfoot,

Or bracken and lichen, mattresses of the wild

Rising, bristling, cushioning, creaking, slipping

But never giving way, however frayed and ragged

Charpoys of string, bending on the village house portico

On which we keep sticks to beat away snakes

And plants of tomato, coriander and jasmine

To sprinkle in the cooking, wise and frugal

Across the Takla Makan Desert, hot and boiling

He says, listen to your inner voice, and trust in my plan

And I will bring you out of the desert to an Oasis of running water

To a place where your work is recompensed

And where you will offer me the first fruits of your labour

And your joy in your work, your family and your food, will be complete

Because you were saved by me.

Yes, if you listen to my inner voice and do what I say,

I will save you.

Jan's sister, Vanora swept the hearth, but there was still soot left in it. Hot points of embers and jewels glowed red and green, emerald and ruby, sky and sapphire. Her vesture was faded grey, patched and threadbare near the collar where her mother had scrubbed it and near the buttons and the shoulder blades, where it must be admitted, she was growing far too big for the dress.

She was tall and slim, her flesh rosy and scrubbed with washing, and carrying wood pails and water, her dirty, ash blonde hair done up in a bun straggling onto her shoulders.

Her brother Jan had come back from the forest with fish and wood. "Hello, sister. Where's mother? Its cold outside, cold as the snows of Kilimanjaro, or the icicles in St. Nicholas' beard. My toes're blue, in need of a toasting by the hearth."

"You warm yourself up," said Vanora. "I'll tell her to stew this with some spicy mint and sour witch-hazel for us, and perhaps some milk we collected from the cows next door, who kindly lent us the animals for a day. We have to feed seventeen at eventide.' The boarders had increased in number for the day, certain hunters and trappers new in the area wanted lodging, and it fell upon the Parsons' inn to feed and shelter them, for a fee of course.

Jan's girlfriend Nollie had brought bread from her own home.

Their mother softly singing from the backdoor as she washed the dishes from the afternoon meal, could be heard, merging with the passing of the breeze in the cold air chinks between the wood slabs that made the walls of the frontiers' house.

"A warrior's shield, a forest in a dish, a tortoise's shell, a porcupine's coat, shining little points of sunlight, the tincture so clear, ringing like bells in my ears. An elf, green, clean, with little pixie ears.

Their mother, an Irishwoman, told lots of tales of battles as well as tales of the little folk. Vanora has started teaching the metis and Indian children and learning from them at the same time, and one thing she finds similar among the culture they described and the culture of her home, was the reverence for the little people of the woods, the fair folk, as her mother would call them, or the forest spirits, as the Indian children would refer to them as.

"My saviour's shield is made of mist, and mossy mountain rock, and ivy on the slopes and waterfalls whinging through the biting cold air, with the sounds of falling sledgehammers as they fall on the rock, and stone cairns to which he sets fire bushes of orange lilies and chrysanthemums, freckle flecked and roaring dark, singing, whorling fragrant petals calling.

“Pine cones in my fingers mean the fir-tree’s spirit coming through my nerves and teaching me contemplation,” said Deerhorn, one of Vanora’s fourteen-year-old students. “Then, no wonder the squirrel comes to nibble cornmeal from my fingers; it is the beginning of my finding merit.”

Vanora listened spellbound to her student expounding the philosophy of the ages of her people as she sat in one of the informal classes in the larch and pine grove they had found outside her house, which they had made into the schoolroom. “When there is a big man, a person, an animal with lots in their store, they must give it to the people who have less. But when you take, take only as much as would tide you over to the next meal and not more, depending on when you know your next one will be. But know also, that the Lord rewards moderation and temperance. This promotes cooperation among benefactor and those who benefit. And always acknowledge your blessings, for this shall set you free from the bonds and slavery to material things, allowing you to converse with others in an enjoyable way, without always trying to protect and defend all that you have.

This season, our people are hunting the buffalo, which water in the creek below the hillside on which the forest covers and grows, shielded from landslides by the dividing and tangling roots of the woody shrubs that dot the valley. This means we are armed with arrows and spears, but we only kill one or two per month. One buffalo can feed a tribe for a season, if the meat is properly seasoned with herbs and salt, dried hanging above the smoke-hole of our tent. Its hide can make coats for five people, its bones can be used as pillars or posts for wi’igwaams, and their bladders can be used as water carrying hides or cisterns on the long journey. And we must thank their spirits for having lent their lives to us. One day our own flesh, fat and bones may be used to feed other animals and our souls will pass into other worlds,’ she says. “Worlds we can but access fleetingly in this life through telling stories and listening to them, taking peyote, hemp, painting pictures in sand, chanting, and dreaming,” she said.

“And these things which you say,” said Vanora, somewhat sceptically. “Have you ever tried any of them?”

“If I were a medicine woman, I might have,” said Deerhorn cryptically. “But it is not known if I will grow to be a shamaness yet.”

Vanora had a terrible time guarding against prejudice against the children’s views, and against the idea that she was very, if not much, different from them.

One day in September, Deerhorn and Rising Arrow took Vanora out into the woods, one time, to show her the vanishing autumn in one of their sacred glades. They made sure that she had fasted that day, eating nothing since morning, and treated themselves with a fast themselves.

Walking shoeless, the children gasped when they saw the beauty of the glade, though they nearly tripped on the log that marked the entrance to it. Five feet away from this, a tulip tree with crusting bark, rose and spread its wide branches adorned with unearthly jade holy leaves sprigging and springing from it like prancing happy chickens, and all down the valley that plunged behind it, in-front of the mound of wild tangling roots, were a sort of wilderness of prim and fading violets, tiny purple flowers like posses of rugged, dainty keys peeking up from doors of leaves and running of shamrocks, the gloves of piano players and pages of hymnals at the altars of the spreading weeds.

And as they looked up, they saw boughs old golden laburnum and birch breaking into the light, which was so soft in the air of the canopy as to be like a gauzy veil.

But the robin and the sparrows that chirped in the branches and the ground were what stole all of the children’s hearts. The sparrow was chattering, cheeping in the dappled sunlight on the one dusty

bare patch of ground in the garden grove, that smelled sweet of freshly turned grass and dried fallen leaves.

Then it alighted on a birch-larch branch, it hopped from here, to there, dancing and fluttering. And then it flew straight to the children's shoulders, and perched on their fingers, weaving a curtain, and silvery chord of flight- slip-streams among them.

It was soft and feathery to the touch and had a big, round, downy front, and white and brown specked wings, deep, piercing and loving beady eyes, and a rumpled sort of crest.

It seemed to be saying, "Welcome to our home of the wood-people and may you wish well to it, its denizens all!"

Then it disappeared for a moment, only to bring another sparrow along with it, and the children had a happy time observing them playing and flying around and making their nest.

A silvery white *bok*, or Siberian crane, had alighted on the dappled mudflat half submerged by rippling, salted seawater, coiling and black. Next by, the mangrove plant grew, tall and graceful and green, spreading its branches from which grew clamouring leaves, shining and rustling in the sun-dried breeze. Around from the mud grew baen needles trying to breathe out of the low level of water, which would soon branch out into new trees through viviparous reproduction, sprouting like children of a sea-anemone, springing from a mother organism.

But the next time she saw them, Vanora began to weep. "My dear children," she said. "It is time for me to tell you what I heard a few days ago, after you took me to that glade. Not all of what you would call my people think kindly of yours, and in a few months' time, when the grasses of next years' summer will be full, the sail people plan to take the land of the wood land folk for themselves.

"We must put a stop to this," the children all decided. "How to carry the enchantment of this glade to the rest of the settlers so that they treat it with respect all of their days?"

"We will do this," Deerhorn said. "Make a circlet of yew wood, and weave within it 5 strings of linen or of cotton or of wool yarn, that your mother uses to knit the sops she uses for cleaning. Kott the ends of the fringes hanging from it, tie the feathers of an eagle, a parakeet and a turtle dove. Pray to the Great Spirit, Wakan Tanka, above it and ask him to aid you in teaching them reverence and compassion. The people are to hang this above their beds, and they will scoop up the dreams that are bad and evil and hopefully evil intentions as well.

Then, they said, we must make up stories about the importance of the landscape and tell them to them as well.

The wood people said: obtain eight branches from dead wood and arrange them as spokes in a circle. Plant an elm tree in the first section, an evergreen juniper in the second, a red-maple tree in the third, a Japanese barberry in the fourth, a tulip tree in the fifth, a quivering aspen in the sixth, and in the seventh, a birch tree and eight put a spit and hearth for potlatch roasting.

The first, juniper stands for the grace of God, red maple stands for the acceptance of his sacrifice and the blood from the body of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion, barberry stands for one's own sacrifice of worldly matters, the tulip tree stands for the material and spiritual fruits of devotion and placing of material wealth in the hands of God, quivering aspen stands for charity and fasting, and a birch stands for hard work.

The fruits of these will be knowledge of one's calling and the ability to collaborate cooperatively with others.

Tell them: man cannot manufacture the grace of God, and our sins are atoned for by his sacrifice. In no way are we allowed to harm others for material reasons or any others whatsoever; we become

happy with the fruits of devotion, charity and fasting, stewarding well the resources we are given, which propel us to emulating the sacrifice of our lord and our hard work both of necessity and of following our talents, not only earns us our daily wages, but also is our contribution to the world that needs our services and our gifts.

Streaks of snow, rivulets of water running down the temple roof of the mountain, infront of which are a group of gracious evergreen trees, rising above deep green blueberry bushes,, reflected in the clear abalone blue of the lake, which echoes in the soft powder blue sky and the watery, patchworked, fielded slopes of the nearer mountains.

“My grandmother makes birchbark baskets very well, and leather fringed jerkins with porcupine quills dyed decorating them. I should like to take you to see them!”

“Maybe she can sell some to settlers who are most gung ho about expanding westwards,” said Vanora. ‘But yet, is it not enough that your people fed mine, when they were starving off the ship of arrival and cold, and had no hopes of the future but the kindness of the people they found there?

“No!” said Deerhorn. “I did not mean that your people should only buy from mine. What would my people do with more silver coins? What I meant was that my grandmother would teach the whites how to live on the land while giving back to the land, not depleting her, not wasting her resources and working with what we have, what we have been given. Oh, do, learn from us the lore of the forest!”

Rising Arrow recited: “White rimmed purple flowers, shining like stars among the clumps of snow amid grey-green clumps of leaves, straight and crooked and pointed like the wings of grasshoppers.

Moons of light and pools of darkness and shadow, speckling the footpath under the jackaranda trees, rising like a branching lung of the clouds of leaves, some of whose foliage are a deep dark forest green and some are glowing red and will fall soon. A nudge from a palm tree growing in their midst, many spicy mint shrubs swaying and stirring coolly in the breeze.

Mynahs and sparrows calling in orchestras and barrages from the trees unseen but heard in their sweet symphonies --This is how the world looks when people of diverse origins can coexist. Grey-blue and purple-green pigeons flying off from branches casting shadows of their opened wings on the grey flagstone paved courtyard. But these shadows, unlike those of the trees, those great water suckers and refuges of the cloud, are not permanent.

The lives of birds and other moving creatures are not permanent, but life in the Garden of Paradise, is, and if you live through every moment, savouring every breath of air through your lungs and nostrils, swim through events and seize the sapling of the task at hand and manoeuvre it to plough the ground, maintaining one’s constant remembrance of the one who made you and loves you, then you may be let into that beautiful garden, after all your tasks on this earth are over.

Ducks and brown geese, taking flight from a sandy, marshy wetland, the water of which shines light blue like a clean mirror, nearby which grows emerald grass with a bit of yellow dried leaves near the edge. The wings of the geese beating against a blue-grey smoky sky, with the halo of a pinkish golden misty cloud, illuminated, rising in the expanse.”

The next story

Falastin stood among them, her headscarf blowing over her hair and shading her forehead with her cupped hand, raising her shovel and ploughing the earth, for she must sow the long grain rice in the wetland to get rid of, cancel her debts.

The grey green sweater her mother had knitted, fitted snugly and her skirt billowed, wrinkling and old. She bent, ankle deep in slurry water, sowed the saplings half a foot high, deep in the marsh, so

that they would be well anchored, and not bowl over when the wind blew close over the water, sending out ripples like the snuffer of a lamp causes it to twinkle and gutter to stop it from burning.

Soon, she would be drying off in-front of the fire, listening to her grandmother tell old tales of elves and dwarves, swan maidens and geese catcher, gnomes and fairies.

Her grey galoshes ankle deep in slick mud, she called to her younger brother, Pir: "Pir! Mizzle and Hie!" Come out of that glowing slosh! It's time to set the fire at the cold-stones' hearth with the lumps of coal you bartered for our stiff cabbages we grew in the paddock."

Pir, with a cheerful face like a glow-worm, sidles up to his sister and says:

"Did she see the geese flying over us? I tied a string to one of the young ones' feet, the webbed paddle's ankle. Now we'll know if ever the same geese return.'

It seemed to him quite a solution. He was always sad to see the creatures leave, after he had made friends with some of them.

The ducks had brown-black heads and white necks, brown fingered white-strong wings, that stirred the air into a gale.

Are people from diverse countries really that fundamentally different from one another? They all like to listen to elders tales, all have to work to make a living, strive from the roots up to the branches to erect the tentpoles of prosperity or just getting by.

Great rugged redemptive hands dragging the cross as he would drag the boards of carpentry.

His sides shivering ad cleaving from the ground, heaving in joy for the remembrance of his father, who is the Lord.

His strong heart beating to stir the ocean and seas, he rises and alights through the door of the tomb which the angel has opened. His nail pierced hands finger the edges of his cloak within which he was shrouded, he pushed the hair from his face and tangling in his brows and raises up on straight slender noble shins to breathe the sunlit air of the just breaking dawn.

It's as if I'm in the first grade again. The books I've been using to write lessons layered with sunlight and oxidation and coaly pencil dust. The Lord has brought me through so much and there is so much more to do yet. I must keep myself open to the things he wants me to do. I must work hard. Must observe, be frugal. Fulfil the obligations, pray, and be kind to all I meet. And later follow the rose-coloured dusty light that lingers in the sky among the suspended clouds above a setting sun. And thank the Lord.

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Grey green grasses, outlined by white, shining in the sparse sunlight. Jersey cows, spotted white on the face, the shoulders, legs and belly, a rich brown on their ears, backs and hindquarters.

A roiling grey – blue watercolour wet cottony sky, touched up with clouds by the divine paintbrush and pools of water misting up the paint on the stiff paper that holds the tint.

The chirping of birds, the howling of a jackal. Athabasca lake, a rippling emerald, reflecting the sweeping blue and slanting clouds of the sky, white snow on the fraktaline peaks, interspersed with hanging precarious steep slopes of black granite. Slabs and chinks of evergreen pine, regimented on the slanting plains, the sloping shore.

Jenny hollered: "where are you?"

And Jan replied, having heard. "I'm here, what about you?"

“Round the bend! Round the hill, see me?”

Jan and Jenny, beholding the snowy mountain tremble, both felt like shouting,

“Don’t shout so loud! Can’t you see? It’s crumbling!” and right then, a sheaf of snow came loose, shivering off of the top of the sharp crag and fold of rock that slated beneath it.

Now they would have to walk towards each-other across the snow, and came to rest like a feathery crumbling mass of cold thaw and bread and dew on the valley of the mountain leeward.

It would be too cold, but travelling alone didn’t seem wise anyways, as the mission they had both to accomplish required the two of them.

Jan braced himself to run across the snow, without knowing this, Jenny did the same. Jan ran like a Javelin, making little more than comma shaped indentations in the fresh, packed, clumps and mounds of snow, finding the ground uneven, but still pushing himself against the slant of the wind and the tearing gale, which stole the heat from his body and a glowing blush from his neck and face.

Jenny’s pinafore made a screaming yowling sound with the wind as it blew through the doilies lace and brocaded embroidery on its front, its collar and sash, making her like a latticed door or window-frame through which light shines through and the wind creaks and cranks.

And they ran, stopped in-front of each-other after half a mile and then each ran towards the other, and continued the journey together.

***

Sheila’s cap of hair like a fiery trail of hyacinths falling from a wicker basket. Swaying like a sapling in the breeze. She leaps from dune to dune upon the beach, harvesting seaweed, bones of flounder and abalones and watching the dash and twist of seawater and the refracted image of the corals under the lapping lashing waves with twisting ropes of ragweed.

Here are some mussel shells, dark and iridescent and shining, violet, to sew into my brother’s cap. Here are some oyster shells to sew into the circlet of my sister’s veil. And here are some scallop shells which I will merely keep in my lacquer box of teeth, to feel at times with my fingers, the soothing fluted fingers, wrinkles and lines.

Her younger sister Litwin trotted behind her. The Golden sun lapped on the cupping, leaning waves, the river an expanse of grey and scintillating highlights of sparkles, sheeting brilliance of sunlight in strewn diamonds upon the dupatta of water.

Their feet, browned and sunburnt, found refuge near the muddy sand and the river’s cooling caress. “Look, look! Here’s a steamer!” One of the boats that looks like a chef’s cap, sailing dry on the water!” cried Litwin. They waved at the people on the steamer and the folks sitting on the upper deck waved back.

Just make sure no water scorpions sting you.

She goes for walks before breakfast,

Meeting Peahens, ducks, pigeons

A worn fir tree with scraggly, scratchy branches

Squirrels burrowing holes beyond its bark

Chipmunks chattering at its roots,

Pine cones hanging like diadems from its twigs

Or apples, or pears, or amber conglomerations

Its piercing, spindly green leaves

Like a wayfarer woman's gauzy veil.

Made thin by fading through sunlight and wind.

And the sparring spurious gusts of acid rain

The scorch of the midsummer's tropical temperate heat

The lash of water and abrasion of scrubber

When she scrubbed the soft linen to get

The spunky sweat out of it.

Now mildew colonizes, now mould builds and springs

Now threadbare, networks of cloth stand exposed.

This is a tale of a woman's garment

What then of her very life of toil

The struggle of a person who owns but one veil?

She is no simpleton, the hardworking girl, but she is a day-watcher. She likes to watch others at their work, others at their play; but when she prays she shuts the door.

Then, diving into her bucket of lye-soaped and rin-soaped clothes, she begins raising them from their watery sleep and lunges, scrubs at the clothes with the brush and beats them against the beating, rinsing stone.

She plunges them once more into the bucket of water and takes them out, and twists them as though they were coiling, twisting serpents into long ropes, squeezing the water out with the strength of her arms and palms as though kneading bread dough. It builds enormous strength in her knuckles, the muscles of her fingers, and the biceps and triceps and her shoulder blades as well. And so, housework is her gymnasium, the barbells and weights she must lift to keep herself healthy and strong. And she says: "The Lord, my father's work, is meat for me; it is my drink to do His will.

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Avan in response said: "What are some resources you already possess that could be used to produce an output from your own cunning and ingenuity?

What are already available to you in terms of time, money, labour power etc. Cloth from old clothes to make into embroidered headscarves/book covers. Wood from old tables to carve into screens, set up afresh into benches/bookshelves? Old broken ceramic dishes that could be used as a pot for soil and a plant? Bean pods of seeds, onion and garlic peelings, potato shells, carrot skins, that could be used to make a compost?

An old cardboard box that could be covered with plastic to shelter chickens which give you daily eggs? Make sure you water those plants daily and harvest the leaves and vegetable fruits when they are ready, as well as feed those chickens every day. Have you ever thought of painting a picture of a messy, weedy garden? Weeds are God's creatures too."

"Have you ever stopped to consider how many accidents stem from people going places by trains, cars and buses, when if they had a livelihood to carry out from their own homes, these accidents

could have been avoided? Ever paused to consider the greenhouse gas output of eating imported foods, such as fruits grown in South America, pushing away the food crop growth of local farmers?

How can you be true to the ideals that spring from taking precautions against harming others in these ways? Growing fruits and vegetables in your garden, or backyard, keeping chickens, buying only locally sourced foods, wearing clothes produced by handlooms, not factories?"

Ever stopped to consider what harm stereotyping can do, especially stereotyping of women? Do you know that the images of women we see onscreen can send the wrong sorts of messages to both men and women about how we should act, talk, think and look? When in reality, common sense and gut instinct, the little small, silent voice within, and God's word, ought to inform us better? Ask: what is the still, small voice telling me, and be silent for a moment to hear it. At the same time, the Holy Spirit can only tell you things out of the storehouse of your own knowledge, things you already know, so it is your job to keep yourself informed by studying your school textbooks, listening to your teachers, and reading newspapers daily, or whenever you can find them, as well as a good, solid dose of God's word and journaling of your thoughts on Sunday, but not only confined to Sundays. How do different characters in the Bible behave and how did God deal with them? What great works were wrought with forgiveness, kindness and compassion? Read Josef and the Silver cup. How were haughty and proud intentions dealt with by God? (Tower of Babel). How did Job behave when he was afflicted, and how did the Lord reward him for his faithfulness?

What were the consequences of King David not spending enough time with his son Absalom, to the extent that his son wanted to usurp the throne from his father? How did David feel about it in the end? David, although the Lord had willed him to be king, also spent too much time with his wives and tricked his General Uziah, the Hittite out of his lawfully married wife. As a consequence, the child born out of the union with Bathsheba also died. God's punishments also come to those whom he favours, if they deserve it. Sometimes bad things happen to good people, but they need to turn to God to avert the trouble. That is what Job did. Job humbly admitted he knew nothing of the Lord's power, of how the Leviathan moves in the sea, the storehouse of hail and rain and frost which are released by God during battle, and the young mountain goats and deer.

Do what the Lord tells you. If you do, your deeds will prosper, and you will have wisdom and understanding to deal with all things on earth, trusting God and interpreting his signs and his holy word correctly, or you may become a horror for the peoples.

Land of sun and land of moonlight

Land of carven willows and lakesights

Driads, sea-nymphs, sirens peeping from the branches

Long green hair tangling in rushes

Buzzing insects: moths and butterflies and dragon-flies

Fluttering about the spades of leaves in clouds, barrages, armies

Glow-worms and earthworms and sow bugs

Crawling, burrowing and curling in the mud on the wet banks of the river.

Scallop shells adorning the banks

Like scattered shards of coloured tiles fixed on a sun-terrace

On top of a rickety house

Benthic seaweed and algae and moss

Growing upon the banks and slopes

Leading down to the salty, cheesy creek

Lending the land a tinge of deep soothing green

That sea-like quality that cools with a mere look.

A cross of weeds and twigs

Of crow's nests and cuckoos' eggs and red seeds

Draped with vines, flowers and leaves

Growing against a tree like a shepherd's staff left at rest-time

Or an anchor, or a buffeting spade

Ploughing up, turning the earth like a sail is buffeted by the wind

Or a veil is slapped by the breeze

An ivy or a shamrock or a burr,

Sticking in the woven grain of my garment.

Always sure to astonish, always sure to cure.

There is a day in store, for all the proud and lofty. Beware. Be humble.

Bridj, she bent, she loosed the cargo, the swilling cod in to the blackened pail. She hoped they would be happy, that their spirits would take the shape and the form of the smoke in which they were roasted by those who consumed them, offering a prayer in thanks for their abundance. To prevent her scarf from coming loose about her, she shrugged her shoulders, to toss the loosening braid down her back and worked her arms, sloughing the lather off the sides of the wooden slats, and into the old tin that they kept shaded under a shelf to prevent the yellow light that illumined it with lemon from the back, or brought forth its quiet opacity like bright cloud gilded by a crack of light, sand that turns to glass in the scorching of the bellows, from warming or from curdling it.

She rolled back her sleeves, smearing the flecks of grease from her tanned and weathered skin, which was wrinkled and pierced by cheeky sun flares, untill the warmth of her flushing blood and the cool of the whey guilded to a draught of freshness, like milk, or of the stinging turbulence of suspended spray when salty meets fresh on the effervescence of the dashed, phosphorescent rocks.

When she looked up, Frances stood on the shore. She beheld him, her eyes flecked with sunset, the remnants of foam, of film, of the skin of the bowl that floated on the surface. "Where is he" she had thought. "I will glean him like rainbow bubbles off the top of a glass of sea water, sparkling, foam icy, clear glacial gleams, the snow froth and the spindle ends of hexagonally flaring, spoked flakes. "The birds fly straight," he said.

His eyes were arrows, yet she drew into them like ghosts in a well, or handkerchiefs drawn into the sleeve, a needle pulled carefully through cotton fabric, a ring falling into water, they were bottomless screens, whose black cavernous ceilings rose as one but looked. All through the waves and the sky, the arches of gulls flying, the water's diamonds, he spoke through the venturies of silence, the centuries of stillness: "I saw only you." The air in its architecture of heat was a temple of mirrors through which I drove, striving to escape my flying reflection, the hanging mists' necklaces like gossamer drapes and pendants of dew that hung from the sky's buttresses silken spider web in

the sun as it stretched and slipped in the gentle breeze, it travelled for it would escape, the wheezing of air between teeth or rocks, or the slipping of water like the flashing of a needle in the sun, cast off your veils and come into the light! With a straight back, braids loosed and fraying in the wind, hands opening, passing over windows like wings, like clouds over a lake or water in a bowl, like a spell over a drink.

Watch the food you eat, for it gives you knowledge, just as hunger gives you knowledge.

When she arose, it was from her entire self, the emptiness of hunger within was like a piston of vacuum from which her movements could emerge like a resurgent spring, and she stood like a tall sapling, her arms, her back, bending and swaying with the weight of the poles she carried, her feet caressing the mud beneath her like a rambunctious companion, a rolling monkey or a bounding rabbit. The reek of rotting rohu rife in her nostrils, which flared and flashed like a frenzied horse straining at his reins.

For you have taught me that there is no such thing as torment for those who have never been in combat or victimized, there is only avoidance, or nets of our own making, snarls that you yourself have laid for yourself. From whom are you hiding, why do you delude yourself that I evade you? Why do you contain yourself like wine in a glass, as if you are afraid of spilling. And yet bend and recline to hear people as though you are careless? This is the greatest hypocrisy of all. When I was conscious of myself, I lost myself, became aware only of perceiving and not of feeling; when I perceived and felt, I could read all minds and those I desired and I became one. I cannot open the doors to let out the light I guard, for what is inside can only emerge, run out like streams of bounded water unbidden.

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The sky, the ciel, looks different at different times: scattered and torn with wolves' tails, duck's wing feathers and downy white goats. Flanks curving, floating, heaving, rising and falling, breathing; rising and falling with the breath of life, the winds of the North, blue, blazing with turquoise.

At other times, it is muddy, grey, pinkish, like rose coloured ringed red sandstone, with the risen sand of the hot plateau, winds of summer, scattered with dust.

The river is the sky's mirror, breaking up whatever colours, shapes or forms the sky has into fraktaline images, following the curves of the scintillating water, which breaks up into braided cascades, many rippled streams.

And foam floats atop it, as the evening darkens, and mist follows, with the night.

Shiela running in a volley of steps of mountainside pebbles crumbling and falling down the slate like steps, hollering for the goats, her voice echoing across the mountain valley.

"Shh! You'll cause an avalanche!" said Avan.

"Come back!" called Shiela to the goats, echoing. "To the maidens of serene footfalls!"

Avan added her mellow voice. "Tis better in a flock, when you are cared for and we can prevent you from wandering too far near the edge of the scree."

"'Tis time! Tis tide for you to come to shelter!" Shiela called to the goats, making a quaint tune with her pipe, as they had reached the main village, and each goat had to be taken into its respective shed for the night.

Najma said to Shiela, "My goat has brought a scent of fresh crushed juniper and blue berries to my lodge – I thank you for stewarding her with such artistry. I shall repay you with a barley cake," but Shiela refused, saying she had but done her duty.

“Your goat is a seer,” she said. “She guides even lambs not of her own through safer paths and channels through the rocks and she bathes each lost lamb that comes to her which begs mothering, with her tongue so that it is warm and clean.”

“Look, look,” said Najma, how the sky is flooded with turquoise drink and grains of crushed lapis lazuli, like petals branching out in a marigold! I am sure it is like the sky David saw when he was shepherding his fathers’ clan’s flock!”

“It unfolds the world like a scone! Violet flowers perking up from the grass; thus the world has the sky blooming on top of it!”

“And look! The mountains red like a shepherd swain’s shoulders, red and tanned, or like Esau’s hairy arms when he ate the pottage. Red sky in the morning, shepherd’s warning, so glad am I that tis evening!”

Their sight of the mountain swooped like an eagle diving for prey, a swooping feeling in the stomach as though riding on a swing; dotted with pine, eucalyptus, cypress and blackberry; pointed brambles picked out sharply by the last few rays of golden sunlight; the rest of the sky’s patchwork intricately wrought tapestry of colours draining quickly of the warmer hues.

The temperature had dropped quickly like an ice-cube slipped down one’s back by an errant schoolmate. The evening star has come out above the shack of Najma’s livestock, like a pendant in the necklace of a nomad.

A pigeon’s feather, an eye, a merging of colours, a sheen.

Tall lush bamboo plant leaves and branches which pour over the wall, two layered, the first, foundational layer built up by regular rocks cemented and sandwiched together, the second, brick, covered by pure, rough grey cement to make a uniform finish. A palm tree’s fronds wave to the side of it, covered partially by a gulmohar tree’s freshness, picked out by the monsoon sunlight just broken out from behind a cloud, a young papaya tree ruffled against the wall.

Weaseley’s red hair like a phoenix, Chang’s like a horse’s mane, Jordan’s like a brambly bush. We must get beyond the hair into discursive thinking.

A barren, branched tree against the grey sky and pearly clouds.

A pigeon, the planar bones of its wings purple and grey as it preens, ruffling up the feathers and diving its beak into them.

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Their tent, insulated by Central Asian tapestry, looks like

A staircase of plums, or barrels of apples

Washed by diamond shining waterfalls in the streaming sun,

Under a fresh shower of leaves lit from behind

Of a silvery-gold smoky dewy lined canopy of leaves

And branches, interlinked, interwoven and meshed

Like the interlocking fingers of friends

When will the walls of this ice palace break?

When will our feet lead to springier balmier grounds?

O when we are no longer afraid of the piercing winds

When we understand the chafe of the slamming breeze

Upon our cheeks is but the caress of God

A stricter nature, the kiss of the sister nurse long forgotten;

The call to kindness and a spirited loving life

Giving oneself in service to all who ask, and those who don't ask

Healing from the mellow wellness within,

Putting one's hands on and blessing, taking from a low place to a high

Catching the moon with water with a net from the lake,

Or shaking olives from a fruit laden sour olive tree

So that they fall, showering, strewing the dark frosted ground

With green wood boughs to be heaped onto barrows

What is the meaning of tilling the earth?

Of lining the grassier peaty barrows with seed?

What is the meaning of birth and the meaning of destiny?

A life where we could work, and work is love made visible.

The harrowing of the soil with the sweat of one's brow,

And the carving of stubble from the ground to feed

The goats, and the trust and bravery put in to protect them from wolves,

And the skill to weave baskets from cane and grass,

And the patience to sew woollen cloth together to make a dress or pant or shirt,

The using of one's body as a shield to protect the wooden door and threshold of the sheepfold,

The nursing of lambs and carrying them when they can't keep up with how fast the others walk,

Not caring how one looks, but taking the sun and the wind and the leaves and walking as one's food, and the lake as one's mirror,

Conversing with one's friends the clouds and the rain,

Casting portions of ash from the campfire into the responsive wind, muttering a shamanic supplication

Such as, wind, bring me oatmeal from my toil, wind be always at my back, wind, protect the poor poultry from the butcher's knife

You cannot order the wind, but it is the voice of God, just as the clouds are his signs

Do not think you can order the wind, only God can do that,

Said Avan, gently touching Yazmina's veil

But Shiela said, "It is our tradition,

Let us pray collectively for all who gather firewood."

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Chapter 5. Aref's childhood home

A peasant family's song:

"Dusk of heaven, caress of night's winds upon the cheek

Toss of stormy clouds and bright peeping suns shining meekly

Grim drizzles and droplets of rain

Falling from the beams of arms

Vast and work-lorn, tossed and leavened

Bosoms cleaved with joy and tresses worn with gladness

Locks of caverns, chains of foam spreading on the breeze

Cairns of leaven, larkspur, corn

Beating feathers, swans and geese,

Climbing coursing, high and fleet

Studded starlight, ear-lobed heat

Spinning rainbows, gold and wheat

Bracelets of sweetness, rain and heat

Gusts of weather, snow and sleet

Drifts and puffs and strings and ropes

Rappunzel's ladders, coils and smokes

Chimney sweepers, dancing blokes

Strokes of sunlight, moonlit spokes

"Seventeen summers worth of plums need pluckin'," Rahim Khan said vociferously. And you and I are gonna pluck them together. "Alright," Homaira walked beside him, her hair swaying under her veil from one side to the next. He tossed her a basket, which she caught nimbly within her arms, turning it like a wheel between them. "Here is the turning chariot of the sun," she said brightly, smiling at him both quickly and suddenly. "I don't understand what you mean," he said non-plussed.

"Here, I'll show you," she said and cast the basket infront of her, rolling it on its side so that it careened down the road infront of them. "A heliocopter!" Oh, he guffawed. "You mean a helicopter!" She chased it down the road, swift on her heels. "Wait!" he called after her and followed suit.

How old is your daughter? The teacher asked Homaira. "Seven," Homaira replied. What is her name? She asked. Ayesha. Was the reply. Ayesha, Ayesha, what is your favourite colour? The teacher asked. Blue, she said. "Alright, can you draw me a picture of a house with a blue sky behind it or of a blue fish in a blue ocean?" Asked Ms. Hussain. She told Homaira: "She is shy. What did you give her for breakfast?" Naan and milk, said Homaira. "You might try giving her an apple for a snack," said the lady. "Ayesha, can you add?" She asked. "I can add," Ayesha replied shyly. Two and two is four, four and four is eight, eight and eight is sixteen,

Sixteen and sixteen is certainly thirty two," the girl rattled off the number two indices. "Oh, she can certainly add, and multiply as well," said Ms. Hussain. We'll put her in class two, just to be on the safe side. "But she can multiply as well!" said Homaira, interceding on Aischa's behalf. She will be much better off going to class three, she will be able to be e challenged and occupied; and this will be much better for the growth of her mind, I am sure! What about her English and her Farsi? Asked the teacher "Let's see ; recite some poetry, let's hear you.

"If you wish for gardens of delight,

Become the servant of the oppressed.

If you wish for the progress of all,

Serve the most downtrodden, and the birds will sing for you.

.A blue bird flying and singing,

A robin chirruping

A jay cocking its head.

Today we are going to learn about Seleuchas Nikator and how he travelled from Greece to Asia. He was born the son of an iron monger and decided he wanted to see far off lands. So he worked as an iron smith's apprentice for 4 years which he was already doing and also as a breadmaker in an inn.

He saved up enough money to buy a caravan and left for Asia inAD46, after training as a general for six months as a part of Alexander the Great's army. They conquered Turkey, Iran, Azarbaijan, and were able to come up to Afghanistan, but when they reached India, they had to stop. "Why?" Asked one of the children. "I will tell you why," said the teacher.

Because once Alexander had captured all his lands, he took captive their king Ambi and asked how he expected to be treated of him and Ambi said: "Like a King." Seeing his dignity Alexander had no choice but to return all his lands to him and restore him, struck by his pride as a king. Now what is a good History lesson if that isn't one?

He measured out the boughs to be legs of the table, then split the branches to form its boards for the surface. He took a peg and drove it into drilled holes in the tops of the legs of the table, joining these with the long boards, near their edges, did this in four corners, shaved and planarized the skins of the wood and smoothened it with sandpaper. And the table was done, ready to be covered with a cloth. The entire process took four hours. At the end of them he was tuckered out, hoping to take a walk in the thrilling air outside.

He peeked out, pulling his pattu about his shoulders like a blanket, and stepped out into the falling snow, cold and fluffy, and gathering in scoops infront of the doorway and sloughing up the windows.

She kneaded the dough like a ravaging pillager, squeezing it into an oblong shape like a diving mermaid. She then made small balls out of its mass, dividing it into many pieces, then rolled them out with a plate and rolling pin, turning them deftly to make them turn out round.

She piled them up and took them to a common chullah or roasting bin outside and met the other women roasting their rotis in the deep oven that was made of clay bricks and mud, and run on scraps of wood, dried leaves and cow-dung, it bellows blazing out in the sun. She pulled the cheeks of one infant and bopped over the head of another in its mother's arms.

I have only two people to feed, she said. She knew the woman had a full household. Perhaps, five, six people, including her inlwas on her husband's side and their siblings. You go first.

She poured water from the pitcher tenderly to wash Rahim Khan's hands. The sparkling water trickled down, cascaded in a waterfall, cleaned his fingers.

Thank you, he said. Now you eat." She sat down to a fare of naan and a spicy, savoury spinach vegetable, seasoned with sesame oil and chilli powder, with a tumbler of water right next by. She ate her supper while Rahim Khan fanned her. When she was finished, he poured water to clean her hands from the same jug, chipped and haggard.

Shall I pick some of those mushrooms in the morning?" she asked as they were stepping out for an evening walk. For tomorrow's lunch? I shall make it and bring it to you if you let me."

"No," he said. "You have no idea what's in those. You had far better pick the broccoli that's growing behind our cabin and broil it or stew it to put in that wooden can box, so you don't have to run all the way to lug the lunch satchel to me at the hillside."

"Alright," she said. "That's what I'll do then. Brocoli? You sure do like your greens, I must say."

"Yes I do," he said cheerfully. "I do like greens, cucumbers, spinach and gumbo, broccoli and French beans, I do, I certainly do."

"Darling," she stroked his shoulder and ruffled his hair. "I will make it for you."

She stirred the pot like a magician conjuring and blew on the fire to make it lap higher round the vessel which shone a brilliant copper. "How much will you take?" she asked, serving him. "Half a ladel," said Rahim Khan. "No, not more." He was not so hungry and his eyes were open wide of his family on a rare holiday when he could see and interact with them. "You're not eating enough," Homaira worried. "No, believe me, I know how it's done." Rahim Khan said. She thought perhaps he had got that from the Haddith, which says, it takes only a few morsels to keep the spine straight. He saw Ayesha cartwheeling and scrambling around the floor of the cabin; said "Is this how they behave when I am not around and you are with them?

She said, yes,' although they do a bit of studying when their school is in session. "Good," said Rahim Khan. "I hope they do. But of course, as children, play is important, I will always say that they should enjoy themselves."

She was wearing a green dress that matched the emerald hazel sparkle of her eyes. She lifted Aref and dunked the pail of water over him, rubbed him over with the soap Rahim Khan had purchased in the nearest market and then upended the pail over him, pouring the water once more to make sure the suds ran off in rivulets onto the packed earth floor.

"Dear Aref," she said as she dried him off with a clean rag. Today is your first day of school. We have to have you clean for all the stuff you will be learning and how you will be growing among thirty other children and one teacher who is highly trained, and probably very picky. I certainly hope there are no lice in your hair at the moment.

It's not the end product that counts so much as the process," said Rahim Khan. "In education, I mean. Teaching a child to hold their attention on a specific task, to develop concentration, and to sustain interest in activities and interactions is as important as the learning to read itself.

"Learning to work teaches you those things," said Homaira. "I want them to learn to work in the fields and in the home and the workshops as well as to learn to read and write. It's a skill I greatly value now you've taught it to me and I thank you for it. Learning to read signposts in the city; bus destinations, billboards, all things I began to learn to do in Kabul when we were still there. Learning to read newspapers is valuable as well.

"Remember where you got this from? Get to know them. Hey, they'd be your friends!"

"Standing in a shop all day, must get hot."

"No, really, I prefer manufacturing the thing myself," said Rahim, looking up from the boards, his hands grimy and full of wood shavings.

"I see the trees outside, free, giving, unfettered but by the wind, in every way unbridled, unmenaced, inviting. What they see passes through them, and they apprehend not. They croak not in unrest, nor do they coax in temerity. But they are venturies of knowing, roots of enlightenment.

"Oh crow spirit, I love thee." Thou taks't only what thou needs't and lets't the rest to be gone. Avaunt, avaunt, away, away, while the light opens and turns in the rent aperture of the sky."

Thus he heard Homaira muttering to herself as she lead the goats out of the shed out onto the pasture. Her hair was askew, strands of auburn, ginger and chestnut spread about on her heaving chest, her skin pale and wet, riding, driven by the wind. "Wait, wait, when wilt thou be back?" he asked and ran forwards to grab her wrist, and her eyes gleamed at him, gloaming, flashing like summer pools, passed over by the moss and ivy reflected in tempestuous storm clouds. The light aslant in the early morning, twin of the dusk, where dust clouds and dew mist mingle like raising robes and straining triangles. The cypress' freshness was so exuberant, bathed half in the navy blue of mystery and other strokes the thrill of white, daisy yellow and gold, precipitating sunlight.

Indeed, many lifts came and went, kites rising on the surge, wobbling, swooping, careening like stars on a swerving course, a tilted ellipse. On those days, Rahim Khan set fly a white pigeon into the sky.

"Indeed, I don't care where you've gone," and she lifted her skirts once in the distance to courtesy and was gone without another word. Fingers playing upon the wind like teething infants or on the voice of a reed like gulls fluttering among the fluorescent foam. Her gums bled and she chewed grass, her hips rolling. A jay cast itself round her infant.

That's how another woman walked, for she wasn't a wall, but a venturi, or a streaming aggregate of various flares, an arching flame, a fluttering spirit. Her son's face pricked upwards, ecstatic in the prickling sun. 'You are free," she said, and that was all he knew, turning and twisting like a fish bursting its muscles, writhing in a crazy loop, exulting in the smoothness of his scales and the sliding effervescence of a weedy lair. "There indeed are showers," she declared, as her little maid tripped among the clamydomonas infested tangle-weed, straining to carry the fragrant rocks, which they would later pound and mix among the hay cakes for the goats, her arms blooming, casting blessings among the paths in the furious bursts of chants and rapturous, lark-like singing. Suddenly the air was like an exploding pear or a strung, singing, streaming harp. The goats' wool pearl and the smell of rams like nectar and honey.

Back on the hill the man climbed up the stone steps, straining to reach the point of caravans to hire himself out as a puller to move pans of milk, wraps of seeds and sweet smelling hay cakes, to tie among vine cords to be bartered for cardamom, wheat and rice. But when the lean days were not upon them, they would eat what the fruit trees cast to the ground, then and there and rise to frisk and play and gambol, searching among the forbidding scrub.

For she was a celestial being and turned summer saults in the air for joy. The descending sleet, kindling the earth with cold like a lantern like a lamp fashioned of icicles and snow-flakes or flowing diadems and sparkling crystals pierced the red clay, the grass and their flesh, so that it disintegrated and rose, sighing up to the minarets of stars to become a soaring call, an offering, a prayer, a gong.

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I'll bring a ghoda for thee, the boys said, and their voices echoed one after the other, questioning, affirming, confirming, saying a ghoda, a ghoda? Yes, on which to sit her on, or rather were they referring to her as a horse? Rizwana, the gypsy girl, loved their plaintive tones, and how their voices sometimes picked up and grew thunderous, or harsh and stern, like searing ashes and the rumbling of the lightning god. "If I am thy mare,' she said, her flank quivering as she changed their meaning. "Then where woulds't thou lead me, I'm afraid I would not go." She chewed several blades of grass and the seeds popped like blooming hibiscuses on the air, like sunflowers turning boldly to the light. "Oh," they said, their voices rising on the wind. "Oh, we'd lead her to a canyon deep, wouldn't we? To a copse fair, a field full , a climbing stair." She countered. "With plaited hair" One of them reached excitedly for her braids. She held herself backwards till she was leaning precariously over the bridge.

Suddenly, arched like a taut bow, she sprung, dived, backwards into the water and she pulled them together with her into the river. "See, here, the fish king's palace" she said and blood flowed from the kisses on her fingertips into the longing at their wrists' veins, their eyes widened in wonder at the fantastic architecture devised here at the bottom of the sea, for the honey combed palace had scallop roofed minarets, and angel's hair for flags, shone like the moon on mother of pearl and the brilliant blue of the sky after a storm.

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She stood there looking at him, as he at her in the clay threshold, latticed by the chinks in the palm roof, cast like embers or galaxies in the setting sun. She was a as new as had there been a regeneration, and he as though it were the first time he had seen a woman made of clay, vine and straw. He took a step back, as if to let the goddess in her embers and flares into his narrowest fissures, then one foreward as if to embrace her, kindle her in his own haggard light.

"Hazard a guess, said she, spinning crowns of light, strands of goat hair in her fingers, winding them about her hair, a rushing, roaring flare.

She singed his shirt and incense burned, turned, leapt into his arms like a squirrel, running headlong into a tree and he did not know what to do with her, but pressed her head into his chest until he could calm her heart's wild beating. He squeezed her locks between his fingers like he would put out a fire …

She was like a pendant of red, inflamed, molten gold, nuzzling, running, fine, darting, quicksilver, strong limbed, veins in hands, swollen rivers tying together her slender, planar bones. She was like a necklace of feathers bouncing and pliant tickling caress. She was like a canary. She was like a strip of ageing cheese, rank and hard and fierce silken soft, mossy, blackened, wizened; she was like a fairy of pure sunlight an angel cut out of the moon, wheat stalks ripening, gleaming, double grain, rough, greasy, parching, warm. And because she was living, he knew she was better than any rag, any sheet, any wall, she was his companion, his friend, his ghost.

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He looked at her, and all his love came rushing back like vast seas into dry oceans, like crabs into shells, like skies sliding over lakes. He ran to her and embraced her. "Dumb boasting, dumb boasting," he said, "Does no one ever any good, "they muttered. But the afternoon sky shone in the thigh deep marsh water of the paddy fields and far off drums and screams rent through the quickening air, gathering maracas and tossing the round up into the air like so many flowers at a Himalayan festival, wells of heaven, a hillman's makeshift altar, stirring grasses, winding trails, rising thatching, singing quails or the exuberant wedding of the ascetic mountain gods, when they embrace by the light of the sun, through mount Kailash's prismatic clouds, through which much brightness peeps, broken into rainbows (yellow, crystalline, indigo, yellow diamond sapphire, peony pink elm pine, jasper green, the jade, the shade of the neck of a peacock, scissor wings of a

grasshopper, gossamer sheen, the brilliant tails of a the swooping parakeet, a tambourine stream, thinned and curving like a mare's nostrils, ringed with diamond and brass, wrought in a link chain, wrought in the horn of a tribal armlet, the tassel of a bracelet, the chime of an anklet, the clanging of a tinkle of ornaments of a doe eyed serving-maid in the gardens of delight, or the copaine of a cowherd, the shepherdess with a staff she twirls around with a tinkling of her fingers, she showers dust and light, shining and swinging like loops or parakeets in flight, like the rounds of an eagle skirting and gesturing in mid-air. Like the spinning of a heron when it takes to the air, like the flapping and swirling ascent of a seagull or a snow goose nipping the foamy waves, like the darting of a rooster among the tethered rams, the clucking of a hen among the piglets, , the slamming of a hornbill or the snapping of a woodpecker among tall and waving branches, the brazen copper greaves of a phoenix, an ibis among the arms of a shooting rider, , javelined on his courser through the rushing winter air, the bonfires of autumn, stacked like hay and rambling acorns.

She floated among the pines like a canoe down a river, flowed among the bamboos like a goat among the high climes, a cloud ringing with chimes of rain, a mare bridled and adorned with eleven coins,

The light slender and piercing as they peer through the mist and beguile anyone's eyes. His teeth rent her skin, his palms steadied her.

He said to her, "The Portion of Jacob is an everlasting ornament; it is a jewel, ever worthy of care. It is a web that shines forth and reaches its tendrils out, a diadem with many coursers and mares. I know not from whence it comes, nor know I where it goes; it is an ever flowing stream. Come gather round it and wonder, drink from it, thou shalt do its work; its work of making rain. It travels from heaven unto heaven, and it gains its speed from the dust unto the clouds; its brightness illuminates the vastness of the universe, realms that unfold from its germ of sentience, its scintillation and exuberance.

She shall attempt the scaling of the height; having readied her mind with dew balms and incense, with mist and blasts of flowing breeze, she will rise, climb from the furnace to the turrets of cloud and foam, where the hawks screech and the rainbows yawn and stretch, spreading like the Lord's mercy all over the earth.

And then will know the stars that call and beckon, that sing and coax like many sirens. The comets of radiance in the breath of the spirit, the phosphorescence among the fish and the coral and the mosses. The children skipping at noon-tide, the herons soaring in the heat.

She wanted to protect him, and that was plain. As he walked reeling, his muscles aching from the climb, as he set their burdens down beside a tree and followed her as she foraged under ferns, mosses, hanging fragrant magnolias, for the bark and the fungi that would heal him, she brought him to a packing horse, laid him down against her, and took out her herbs and stroked him with her fingers until he was well again.

And when he got up and saw, he rose and saw the picture of the fresh oyster coloured house, lit with the sun shining upon it, the eucalyptus tree and the tethered donkeys bowed and tossing sticks at one another infront of it, and braying, chewing grass, pawing and galloping, and the apples lying in a shawl shining in the sun,

The miracle is too great, it surfeits

Where have you come from, O Sairandhri, from where do you alight that I see you, and yet can hold you not?

Her veil obscured her face, her brows and cheeks in shadow. Her lips had a firm and stern look to them, as if all she said and did was mean to the utmost. She took his face in her hands to feel the creases and the folds, the veins and holes of a shining, dry, curling, rotten leaf. It was a face cupping, upturning like a boat, like a saucer, like a lantern devoid of the oil but the burnished red, russet, gold

emerging forth and wavering like a mist, a vessel waiting for rain or the milky shadow of the liquid diamond sky to pass over and bless it.

Do you feel the drums in your heart, because I do, I see the young banana plants waving in the breeze like tribal stalks, legs rising tall and proud in a dance.

The rain falls through the golden shafts of light, showers of lavender fog towering, illumined coral embers circumambulating in worshipful spirals, shielded by pearly, indistinct blue, dotted by brown and white fawn's markings, darting in among the rising waterfall dew.

Do you see what I do?

She took him, swaying, capsizing like a boat, like a mesmerized snake, into her sinews and chewed him, as all the while the throbbing eased.

The pot stirring and crows clawing.

I come from the lights at night, dotting the hills in the distance, and the fisherman's boats; I pour from the vortex of air in the autumn and spring storms, rising and swooping through funnels of rain, I am the wind upon which the yellow leaves and the undulating clouds rise, flying with the hawk and the eagle, circling, surveying all that I protect, all that I defend, all that I call my own. It is through my peace that you are fed, through the stream of consciousness that you are alive.

"I sing thee, Jiban debata. I am brave, daring and strong. My muscles, coiled like snakes, do spring to toil for thee. I run always, I swim, the scents and wills of the air guide and excite my nostrils. Thou wind, I am thy steed.

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Imraan bumped into Junaid, the goat, once, twice, and embraced him as they tumbled to the ground. His hands around Junaid's shoulders, Junaid butted him gently with the side of his jaw. He will drag you, sweet djinn, across the sands!" cired Homaira. "He will make of you a streak in the desert!"

He released the goat, and the goat shot forward like a comet, tearing a rend in the sky with his horns. "We shall fly!" railed Aishcha. Junaid scampered sideways, ears flying, daring them to keep up with him and bared his teeth. The two ran behind him and he reared, they charged and he twisted, rearing backwards over them in a coiled arc or a bridge, like a stream of tea pouring from an unfired jug, smelling strong sweet and heated like the marsh from whence it was raised, patted and shaped into curving, graceful vessel by nimble fingers.

Ten yards off Imraan caught Aishca by the waist and flipped her over, her hair flying. So she was a star, a flower, a gull borne upon the wind. Let me go, Imraan!" she cried, and her arms seized centrifuge and she launched herself from his arms upon the flying air like a gymnast twirling from a trapeze, or a little fiend whirling around a bonfire on a cooking spoon.

Rahim Khan had not shod them with anklets or with rings, such being beyond the purchase of dust and stone and ground flour that settled on their faces and fingers in the eternity of leaping between one repast and the next.

The sides of the pot Homaira was using was red or rusty with the stains of red bean foam thick, sweet, viscous, running down the sides. It was aluminium, and it gleamed ever new in the slanting light from the window portal/opening sky blue deep, grey violet, off-white lemon/golden fleece yellow, its curved rim, bending and cracked with the molten heat of boiling;

A little girl, jumping, tumbling, chasing like an eddy of wind, casting a spray of fallen leaves

A boy leading the young sheep with his rod barred across his shoulders and his breast heaving

Homaira bumped each of their heads and they were off, running, mingling among the seeds and the bursting, crying grasses and curling, bubbling, thirsting streams.

Seventeen times the girl stoked the fire before she called umbridge and blew it out. Her flying, matted hair twisted into braids, the girl rose like tent poles erecting themselves in a guttering wind and alighted upon the draping emerald mists, sequinned by hot points of light here, dimpled and pierced by cool spots of purple shade there, like a strewing of needles, or like a sack cloth puckered with red hot pins, or a woman's blowing hair interlaced with dew.

Scrubbing till her back was strained, washing till her hands were cracked, scraping till her nails were raw; she rose, like canary bird, to hang up her washing. And cool water streamed from the blue, and paint chipped like bits of hard bread. Sunlight was cast like warming honey upon the dough of time that was leavening

"I love her like my sister, for her compassion, maid, and all of it. She once brought me to the store of loving, and almost set me free upon the ocean. She is a kind woman, such as mends the things with her needle and ingenuity, of children not her own."

The sky is blue like a robin's egg, with fuming smoke and curtains of dust twirling like angry angel's breath, or white lime powder or aurora borealis. We draw the angel's stair onwards

She bound up the leaves and tossed them into the river, where they arranged themselves spontaneously into a sail/rowing boat, with a filled mast.

The sides of a building picked out brilliantly like the crest of a rising wave, the buttercups on a dark valley, or cascading light upon a rough cliff face.

Whisper your wares to the Lord, and let the weight of your merchandise curl up into the air like smoke, while still you carry them, or like drying leaves pinched crimson with the cold, crying wind. A piece of cool metal reflecting the sky, like a lake, whose surface is disturbed by the

I love thee, women of the air, whose flesh is like the arms of a mango, and whose arms are like blossoms fine.

The quiet of the seashore at noon is like treacle bitten into at a stretch- the screeching of the noon-tide birds like echoes of shrill screams in the sand waves of a desert. The light filters through the straw basket roof casting a travelling, dappled constellation over a cool, dark dirt. Fish leaping through hoops of light, plunging through icy dashes, splashes, blocks of water. Trust people to understand what they must, to read from the simaculum of dust, dirt and cloud and sky, light and shade, breeze and cloud.

Swinging her satchel on her back, she went laughingly, but her eyes did not smile. The girl climbing, and climbing, and yet a top to reach? And then she saw the woman, leaning forward with the weight of water on poles slung across her back, her eyes lowered, her hair blowing freely, drifting sideways, in the passing breeze.

Go gently, my love, thine eyes are fire/Of stars shining brightly on a mid-winter night/Thy voice hath the rumble of lingering thunder/Thy hands may be strong, but thy fingers are light

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We went to Dhakuria lake together, my father and I, after scrambling my mother and aunt out for gift shopping for our relatives. We walked past couples viewing the lake and saw many ripples in the green light, the flow was cold and silver, the branches scooping down, scooping round islands, mounds, midway. As we passed him on the bench, we saw the tree rising, covered with mite sized snow down sprinkling, leading up to the window at the center, spiralled your eyes enter through a

trap and caress the navy jade, brought swooping down chutes and nebulae, the emerald shrubs and creepers round it like a capering skirt, worn ragged and streaked by the breeze.

The island halfway down stream was encrusted by barnacly tree, raising its arms to pray and to scrape at the sky, strip it and split its blue open, blinding. It was the tribes of white storks plotting the jagged branches, picking on the rocks, rising here one time and settling like flakes melting. I know, because I feel you in my veins with the sky's brightness, and ebbing dance, you are in the juddering of an eyelid, , and the breath that catches in a throat.

This time we stood on a pier and were moved by the water that flowed beneath us, passing in serene emerald ripples. The gnarly trees on the island were white against the cerulean sky. Even watching them from the other bank, the branches just over us dipped in the lake and their reflection wavered, blossoms cool, fresh, the lake a stark, smoky oval, sheds sharp, breath carved by knife from the skull.

I have loved you since before the birth of my soul.

Thus, as we passed through the streets in search of a book for my aunt, we passed a peasant family of seven smudged in green, violet and blue, their faces lit by violet mischief, lavender stealth of the gleams of sky on ivy and moss coloured water. The beguiling eyes of a peacock feather, the voluptuous grace of its blue neck was not for them, but sneak, stealth, humility. The eldest sister smiled at me through eyes like chinks cut out of a sawing board, she seemed to be saying: "may your soul flow like a flying screen, A cast off roof soaring on the wind, your chest be warm with the stirring of the leaves, the dark blue sorrow of the sky promising its gift of an empty bowl, and the talons of a winging bird.

And that gap, that silence, that blackness was worth it, that swooping to meet another twin soul. It darkens early in this hallowed land, where peasants carry brass bowls in their ears, and the stars ringing in the galaxy for her like a set of his bracelets clashing and jangling in a frenzy of unhinged dance.

There was once peasant woman whose gaps between her moss-coloured teeth let in the sky and the sloshing ocean, and her tongue was like a wild red hibiscus coiling like a mesmerized serpent.

When she had been younger, she had lived in the city, and from her window could see the bright enamel sky, sapphire blue and hard green turquoise, grey, flurried, teared, rent by coconut palm fronds before her, bubbling with baking houses of molten sand and robin's egg blue shining in the dawn light, cracked open like yolks torn through from a fragile jagged, broken shell

When she woke in sorrow of a morning she saw the sky outside egret grey with a touch of jay or iris blue, a flute's plaintive strains shining onto her stricken face, a mercy tunnelling to her, sun's rays bursting cracks in a slatted roof or shattered wall.

Hanging pigeons of leaves, the branches of the apple tree slender and rising against the cold, bright sky like so many ringed, stark and graceful fingers or rather thinned, converted, shot backwards like a spinning disc, the bull's eye of a spinning arrow, a creaking silhouetted in the dawn light, austere, its foliage shining like the effulgent sparks in a haze showering from a lantern.

The house was small inside, the walls painted a light green, floor covered with hardened cow dung and the roof thatched with hay and date palm branches. Given a bucket of water, the child ladled a mug into it, and drew some water out and then splashed it all over the room. The weather was so hot that the water quickly evaporated within minutes, leaving streaks of dampness on the walls and the tight packed cow dung floor.

The other children squealed as they had gotten a blast of the droplets too. Irfan felt the coolness vapourizing from his shirt and his neck, removing the heat of the afternoon, and performed the task

again, and this time, the water stayed longer, because the sun had slipped five rungs down the zenith.

Imagine what it will be like this winter when we have snow!" said Samaira to the rest. "We shall have a fine, fine time, won't we?"

"We shall have blistering, blistering cold, like glaciers, which we shall then enjoy! Let's just think about it, think deliciously about ice cubes slipping down our backs and today's heat won't seem so strong.

They sat in a circle, squealing and muttering, holding hands and passing messages with Junaid as the denner standing outside of the ring to detect the pulses.

"There! "I saw your hand pulse there!" said Junaid triumphantly. "You're both out for next round! Come on out of the circle!

Now let's really imagine the ice cube thing!" said Irfan. They sat with their eyes closed. "Ooh," said one. "It's better than real snow, I swear!"

"Ever heard of the snow maiden?"

"No. What about her?"

"A brother and sister sculpted her out of snow just like you make a snowman. When they wanted to take her to their house, she followed them in, but melted from the heat of the flames into a puddle and that was the end of her."

"Poor thing! I don't like that story!

"It's meant to mean that pretty things of the imagination have no place in practical life, and should be left outside with the elements."

"What if battling with the elements is practical life for us?"

"Why then, we have every right to fantastical mascots and fairy stories…"

The ice maiden with her snowy arms raised to balance the crystal pitcher on her head, waved to them from the window. Her hair was made of corn silk, and her pinafore of white lace. She wears white stockings of a diamond pattern, and her boots are long upto her knees like leathern ice skates.

The children waved back.

"But we are brown," they said. "And proud to be so. She brings a calming, a tempering of the summer to us, and we bring to her a heating of the winter. I wonder if she could bring the autumn to us as well. What would that look like?"

"No, that would be a boy Robin, with fallen red leaves and wings of carmine dyed like tailor's muslin, or red satin and velvet, streaked with canary yellow filaments in its feathers."

Oh, do help me haul the bucket of water outside for the goats to drink from. We also have to water the crops so that they do not get dried out …

The colours of red, white and black form the colours of our distant hills, the red laterite and the white snow drops, and the black loam and the mounds of evergreen and pine that grow from it.

And villages of many houses piled on top of eachother, like anthills, but they are people's settlements, like the rock caves of Sierra Nevada, or the cliff monasteries of Ajanta, and the rock hewn temple of Ellora. Windows look out onto walkways, and walkways onto fences, which close

the road from the ravine, the steep slope of the hill which is overgrown with furze, and mulberry and juniper in that half-glacier clime.

Piling, leaning, teetering, cantilevering on the edge of the cliff, jugs of water in the windows, to cool the interiors of the houses.

"Clouds roil, storms' here.

Captain says

What captain says

In every group five members.

"Dear Ayesha, you are our older sister; our guardian while mother is out. Watch over us; let us play captain-captain. "

The children chanting: "Clouds swirl and billow

Storms roil, descending like buckets of ice

Tempests and pillars of rain and wind.

Break out into life boats,

Each boat takes three sailors,

And each boat a sail, to be guided to the coast.

Oars toss and stir the ocean

Pump your biceps powerfully

To surge on ahead like a sturgeon with fins.

Thule pins turning, arms straining

Against the whirlpools and the currents

Electric, coursing in the eye of the storm."

"Next round, next round! Captain says two people in each boat! You're out Irfan!

Next round! I am Peter, steering the boat in the storm. Who will cast our fish overboard from their nets? For we are sinking! Wait, who is that standing across from us on the shore?

Is, it is. Come, he will calm the storm. He will come to us, walking across the waves like a miraculous straw, an angel of light, a duck swimming steadily.

"Ayesha Didi, what can we do against this war, oh, do you know? Do tell us."

"Well, you can do your best with your studies, reading and writing, and arithmetic so that your mind will be occupied with something that is useful as well as wins the Lord's favour. So that you might someday become a poet, writer, teacher, architect, doctor or engineer, someone driven by their craft and who drives the world, making our country prosperous, safe, healthy to live in, and proud.

You could do your best at chores such as making naan, carpentry and house fixing, and do them diligently that you might find a vocation for life which you could articulate with your mind and with your hands, earning the true bread.

Thus, either way or even both ways, you would be a good and obedient child of God who seeks His purpose and to deliver the goods with the best of his or her skill and knowledge. And deepening your skills and knowledge is of utmost importance because the holy spirit can only use in individuals skills and knowledge they already possess. Thus it is their duty to constantly work and upgrade them, though sometimes pausing to reflect and evaluate the direction and usefulness of their work and what needs to be changed.

Although in the case of Muhammad, who was not educated and could not read until the Lord commanded him to read what Gibreel had written on the sand, it seems that the Lord imbued a man with powers it was not already known that the man possessed.

One goal is to seek as your model some figure in religious history, like Mohammed or like Christ, or like Khadija, Ayesha or Mary, and seek to emulate him or her in one's life, habits and conduct. And I shall tell you about them, so that you can decide. Mohammed worked diligently caring for goats, -- bless them! camels and horses all his childhood and was used to a life of privation and frugality. He was so good at his job of keeping track of his flocks and of merchandise he had to deliver at the varying Arab towns he passed through on his journeys, that he was made leader of the caravan of his new and older wife Khadija. One day when he had taken a day off to pray in a cave, the incident which I already mentioned occurred to him, and as a result of the vison of the angel and the experience of reading God's words in the sand when he thought he was illiterate, he could not speak for three days when he went back home. When he regained his powers of speech, he told his family what had passed, and he often began to visit the cave, fasting, and waiting for more revelations from God, which always occurred and which he would repeat later to his family when he was in their company so that they could record it. It was said of his speeches that he said that moderation was key in the life of any good man or woman, with three times a week of fasting being a maximum, although it was no one who fasted always. It was also said that he was fond of dates, and that his eyebrows were like prayer-niches behind which a devotee hides to speak with the Inspirer.

As for Iesu, he will calm the storm with his hands, as he once did on the Sea at Galilee. He shook the foundations of the storm with his power, until it disappeared. Just like he might do with this war, if we pray and ask him to reveal to us what to do about it.

Though he is a God of power, his hands are gentle, both a carpenter's hands and a shepherd's, used to planing and sawing diligently, and carrying new born lambs against his bosom, and feeding doves and grey blue pigeons at midday.

They are also a gleaners' hands, those of a poor labourer or farmer, who harvest the wheat with the strength and dexterity of his arms and gazes at the miracle of a few grains shining in the lines of his palm.

You are his children, he who said: suffer the little children to come unto Me. And if you follow him, he will guide you into joy and adventure, if you will but accept him as your saviour and hold converse with him when you are confused, sad or lonely. This, so that he can counsel you that you can make something of your sorrow and your strength, something beautiful wise and wonderful, of your life, something useful, planned and spontaneous.

"Junaid, Irfan, Samaira, Fatima, Aref, Saleem, would you like some naan? I can't heat it, for we've been banned from using fire, but I can give it to you with half an onion! Would you like that?" they could still smell the burning grain from the chullah. "Yes, we would, to be sure." Their older sister Ayesha dug into the onion with a knife, splitting it in half. She peeled away the papery skin and placed it between two halves of the same bread.

"Here. Eat."

Junaid and Irfan both had recently graduated from eating mashed food. "Indeed," he said. "I thank you, dear older sister, for filling our bellies when Ma isn't around." Irfan hugged Ayesha around the

legs and took the parcel from on high, sitting down in a corner of the house to munch upon it with concentration. Irfan joined him, followed by Saleem, Fatima, and Aref.

"Do you think the rich-folk enjoy their meals as much as we poor-folk do, Irfan?" Juanid asked.

"I doubt that," said Junaid. "But we're rich, for all I know, I've never seen a king or queen in ought except myself or you or Amma or Abba."

"Everyone enjoys their food, Junaid," said Aischa. "And everyone needs to eat too. Let's not start making differentiations."

"There is nothing so entrancing as simplicity," said Ayesha, for she did not share their views, but was proud of them that they did not let themselves be walked over by people more endowed with wealth than they. "In fact, I might help myself to some too…" she said and they made room for her to join them, and they watched the evening together at dinner from the door and the windows, and then took a walk for Ayesha to drop off the children who were not her siblings at other people's homes where they belonged.

Have you ever seen a factory? Asked Junaid to the big sister Ayesha, panting in gusts in the chilly air, his dusky cheeks rosy with the chafing cold.

"Yes I have," Ayesha said slowly, "When I went to the city once."

"What are the rules governing the place, dear sister?" asked Irfan. "For we know every place has its rules and ways, and wish to know."

"No escaping to the cities to work in factories, children. It's not all it's cracked up to be," said lissome Ayesha, stoking the fire.

"We know. It's dangerous to work in many of them, which is why we want to know about the safety regulations, to know how people remain safe."

"Well," said Ayesha. "there must be ventilation, a smokehole, for all exhaust fumes and soot. There must be a barrier in between fires or combustion chambers and the cabin within which workers operate, where they work. They should have on helmets and fireproof suits when working in construction or near flames."

"And?"

"Workers should be allowed breaks for taking drinks of water, lunch, and going to the men's room whenever they need to.

"And?"

"Workers should wear protective and insulator gloves when working with chopping machines, by which otherwise they may be greivously injured. They should be provided with goggles for eyes when working with lazer equipment, which can harm the retina and the skin, if not dealt with carefully, or if pointed in the direction of the eyes. When standing in dusty areas, such as cotton gins, feather packing areas or sawdust infested workrooms, they should be provided with no less than gas masks, to prevent themselves from getting sandy lung syndrome.

"When working with acids or alkalis in dyeing or soap or chemical industries, they should be given full body suits, of acid and base resistant material in order to protect their skin from harm, irritation, or corrosion."

"Not all of it is pretty, you know," said Ayesha. "Working in factories actually unearths some pretty gory stuff."

"Its not all fun and games, you know."

"We know."

"But it could be if we focussed on knowledge based, service based and agriculturally centred economy." said Aref slowly. "Why should anyone have to work under such hazardous conditions that their livelihood is a threat to their life? Work is supposed to be enabling, empowering, not like this! Risking repetitive stress injury and sending the mind into blankness and oblivion; why should any human being, with the power to think, build on his own and communicate with the universe be forced into such penury?

"The only answer," said Ayesha, "Could be that it is not by choice but by necessity, coercion, a manifestation of inequalities by which those whom, divorced from the means of production work for those who own them, by the simple fact that they do not possess a modern enlightenment based education and the others do, who drive the world with their own learning and power, and the ownership of the means of production which was wrested long ago from the others who are now made to work for the gain of the owners."

"Tacit learning," said Ayesha to the others, "Is very very important. You must always lead yourself to discover how things you experience make you feel, both inside your body and inside your heart, mind and emotions. Only then can you grow in the way of humanity, learn how to make of your experience something which can be shared with others and made to improve one another's lives."

"Only then can you plan on a response that is appropriate that takes you and the other somewhere and that teaches you both something about yourselves and the world and how you should proceed. In the sacred self intellect there exists a solution to every problem that works for everybody. The key is to tap into that solution, and to behave as if everyone mattered equally. Always try to please everyone in each decision or action that you make. On the other hand, one who is simply looking for approval from all and sundry won't be able to do anything well.

"You know the feeling of warmth in your palms and the soles of your feet? That is healing energy. You need to pay attention to those feelings in order to allow them to heal you. You need to spend some time alone, everyday. And then, let no one shake you. Continue on your path of destiny, of your calling. All healing occurs in an affirmative thinking system, where there is a solution to everything that everyone is facing at every moment in each world. Healing thought in this occurs through absolute curing and not coping. It recognizes the necessity of each member of the community to its functionality and thriving, health and establishment of justice, and allows space for each to contribute in his or her own way to the welfare of individuals and the community. And in making decisions, we need to take the opinion of everybody and move on forward from there. We should think more about how to instate communism here.

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Dodging in the hopscotch squares of the dust, the broom sweeps sparkles that swirl about you tilll you enter, you step forth into the blue stream, painfully turquoise sky sapphire, wind heated wavers. And you follow the star.
It is the smiling of the burning anvil, the radiance of the wheat stack sapling spilling flowers.
The wizard Jayanka told me, not to give deference to what I put inside my belly.
She sat with the one who does up the clothes for the fair folk out there. She sat indeed with him.
Tying her cap about her curly head and knotting it neath her chin, so that she could lean forewards, elbows to her knees.
Ventured so far into magic that there was much guttation in her limbs.
Is that really how you thought of me?
Will you fold that one over like and ear so it flops? She asked. "Ay, I will," he says, sowing the collar of the shirt with assiduity. "Oh gosh, this light is blinding!" She screamed. She opens her eyes wider, and the light enters more, larger, and it only opens and warms. Her chest throbs and crashes like the bolt of lightning folding in on itself, rivers of the snowmelt gush across the river down the hillside

on which they were standing like the gangetic rush thawing from the hewn-out channels, and ridges of the mountain. I stare and then I become a fountain of flight, of scoping winged spirit, a river, coursing, across the flagged eroding stones, welling and rumbling in the canyonic oxbow lakes, suffusing the flesh.
And now she is soft, she is cool, like the gushing river water, nudging and hugging and chafing against the crumbling stone banks
Sitting with a half wolf, half dog, K'iche, and her pups, yipping and yelping and howling, yowling
"And I am the stone bank," says the tailor's son. "I am the faces of stone, I built the shrine, the gleam, stream.."
"What would you? Is it I who surge these flapping tails, sails, and turn these creaking streams, I who weave these whirling chords, and rig these straining ship frames, with lightning, so they may be strong. Nay! It is the river himself, taking the path it sees best, grateful for the light with it is clothed.
The black raven's wing, slate calm, rainbow glossy, its eye like the sliver of the snowy sky, or heaven inked with grey drifting cloud..
The air is heavy, laden with moisture, breaks forth inky gossamer wafts of wool, dripping tufts of unspooled sheep's wool, break forth into shower drops, arrow darts of shimmering coolness and glancing light.
O bright heaven, blue light, clean like the enamel on a robin's egg
O slanitng yellow marmalade light, warm as an egg's yolk, gleaming as an egg's white, clear and green gleaming.
Warble waft from my puckered lips like as song, like a soothing call, like a dove cooing her young ones to calm after a raid on her nest
The light is sharp, needle silver, harsh like the steel of a thimble, flowing on the cupped leaves that slop like grapes, like languid dippers that cannot hold the dew, which glances on their emerald eyes, fish shaped and beautiful.
Glittering, lavender pooled, white ridged, orange hearted, ivory sheened, drifting in soft indigo like bark on a lake of churning demons and gods, like the shaded blue of the throat that sequestered nagin's poison, like a peacock's neck, bending and gracious.
Splash in that water because it is given to you, refreshed, bloom, it was given as a gift of the preceptor for his children, cool your neck, your face, your arms.
More ecstasy I cannot take, I cannot take., I cannot take. It is past, I cannot thank you, but yet I shall by offering my best to you though preparing lovingly your repast.

What does it mean to break red ochre upon a stone altar? I know what it means, Sheila said. It means everything from telling stories to making sacrifice, preparing food, to letting blood for healing. To break red ochre upon a stone altar you must be thirsty, but only so thirsty that you would only drink water, but turn your tongue from blood. She swallowed.
The cradle rocking, the wind sighing, the petals unfurling, the dogs crying
The water flowing, running, tumbling
The birds calling warbling, yammering
The axes falling, splintering, cleaving
Pitifully yammering, who is it who calls?

I hear the rise of the yellow dirt upon the winds like the drifting of a yellow sari on its improvised drying line, unfolding, lilting. Like the desert mists in a golden dawn.

Fortunate divers plunge into the bottom of a coral sea, I mean the soft billowy folds of the blue, the kelp strands gloaming in the cobalt light, the mill weed, tangling, rotting, salting, freshening, straightening, ribbonned pillars of the ocean ceiling, with an ornate lattice of waves and snow-capped foam, like courser's manes chasing as their stallions chase a prize, or the many snow-capped

Himalayas emerging forth through the wavering mist, a vessel waiting for rain, or the milky shadow of the liquid diamond sky to pass over and bless it.

Do you feel the drums in your heart? Because I do. See the young banana plants waving in the breeze like tribal stalks, legs rising tall and proud in a dance?

The rain falls though the golden shafts of light, showers of lavender fog towering, illumined coral embers circum-ambulating in worshipful spirals, shielded by pearly, indistinct blue, dotted by brown and white fawn's markings, darting in among the rising waterfall dew.

Do you see what I do?

She took him, swaying, capsizing like a boat, like a mesmerised snake, into her sinews and chewed him, as all the while the throbbing eased.

The pot stirring and the crows clawing.

I come from the lights at night, dotting the hills in the distance, and the fisherman's boats, I pour from the vortex of air in the autumn and spring storms, rising and swooping through funnels of rain, I am the wind upon which the yellow leaves and the undulating clouds rise, flying with the hawk and the eagle, circling, surveying all that I protect, all that I defend, all that I call my own. It is through my peace that you are fed, through the stream of consciousness that you are alive.

I sing thee, jiban debata. I am brave, daring and strong. My muscles, coiled like snakes do spring and toil for thee. I run always, I swim, the scents and wills of the air guide and excite my nostrils. Thou wind, I am thy steed."

Bamboo leaves, strands, knives, fluttering, teething in the lap of the mountain valley, in the jaws of the canyon – they herald the growth of the wood, the good for fodder and the kindle for firewood. Little rings of growth, axles of the sturdy stalking grass, like trees or the legs of tall, good, hardworking youths.
She sat, watching the night fire, her skin pricking up in goose flesh for the cold. She swatted away mosquitos and fireflies and once shivered when a lizard crossed her leg. Spars shot up from the flames reflected in Rahim Khan's eyes.

I am thinking of writing a letter to my father," said Homaira. "Will you transcribe it for me?"

"Of course," said Rahim Khan.

"Dear father," she wrote. "Here where the apples blow there is no wind of sand from a desert. All is well watered, pouring from the heavens and from the irrigation tanks we have built into our roofs and fed into our fields. It seems the orchards are in perpetual bloom. We will come to visit you in Kabul when our first son, Aref, turns two.

I am very sorry we left the neighbourhood so soon after the proposal but there were many who would not have approved of our marriage to one another, seeing as we are from divergent communities and ethnic groups.

Our daughter is six months old and is being weaned, learning words which we strive to teach her, and pray that she will remember and learn to talk, although there is no hurry as of yet. She likes the word for sky especially, pointing at it and asking when she will be allowed to roam and fly it as the birds do. Her father says she is a pilot in the making. I of course would prefer her to remain on the ground and not bother herself with heights other than climbing the local mountains and travelling with me to distant markets when selling times come.

Do write, or have written for you, as soon as possible. How is your new work at the chaykhana and my bothers? Rahim Khan transcribed this for me, so I say thanks to him."

The sky was their daughter's treasure, where the sparrows made their nests at the crossroads between tangling branches and clouds, where hawks circled, and where rainbows shone and arced. You must follow, said her mother, the tincture of the blue sky, the arches of the eagle's wings, the domes of the clouds, and the arrows of rain.

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"Sing, O barren, that thou dids't not bear,

Break forth into singing, and cry aloud

That thou dids't not travail with child,

For more are the children of the desolate

Than the children of the married wife," says the lord.

"Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them

Stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations,

Spare not, strengthen thy chords and strengthen thy stakes,

For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and

On the left, and thy seed shall inherit the deserts,

And make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Don't be bad, children," said Homaira. If a stranger comes don't let him in but give him water from the jug so that your souls may be salvaged when the time of reckoning comes, and make him wait outside until I come back. Don't play with the fire and do your chores as neatly as you can.

She poured half a cup of water into the pot of rice and lit the fire beneath it for it to cook while she mended her daughter's shirt; before she went out to pour water in the fields and to ply her stainless steel on the rest of the village in return for old clothes. She tucked her scarf in her skirt and adjusted her veil, hoisted her tub of wares onto the pad on the head, and tripped out of the house.

She walked for an ambling half hour through the mountainous clime barefoot, then through a copse on a prairie or plateau, where it seemed parrots squawked on every branch and the ground was carpeted with moss, ferns, lichen and dew. It felt quite heavenly on bare feet, a welcome change from the sharp pebbles and chalcedony of the unforested bits. Then she came to a house on the edge of the copse, weather-beaten, thatched with dried marsh-grass and with shells hanging in the windows, and wondered if she was sure if it was the correct dwelling. She knocked. An old, grizzled woman opened the door that was almost like a caravan's, and welcomed her in. The door was studded with turquoise and lapis lazuli and carved with petals and blossoms, and leaves arranged in a spiral galaxy like form, a lattice of buds and foliage.

"Where is Rizwana?" Homaia asked. "Rizwana is mending," said the woman. "In the paddock behind the back door."

Shall I go there then? Asked Homaira, and stepped around the caravan like house – no, it was a caravan! Into the swirling mud to the field behind the caravan window. Rizwana sat perched on a tree branch, laden with orange flowers, mending a brother's shirt.

"Dear Rizwana, how are you?" she asked tenderly.

"I am keeping quite well, may God be praised, at this age. And how does it go with you?"

"We are well," said Homaira, "With many thanks to Him, but perhaps it was necessity that sent me to speak with you of an afternoon, on business of my husband's as well as children. My son has recently joined school and since neither of his parents," she indicated herself, "Are educated, he has no one to help him with his homework when he comes home from his class."

"Say on," said Rizwana, encouraging her.

Homaira poured out the bitterness that was at the center of her heart.

"When he doesn't know the answer to a question, he asks us, and we tell him something, and the next day the teacher says it is wrong and then he feels he is wasting his time doing the homework. Although we make him help in the fields and in the house, we feel that he needs to be educated, to survive well in the world in which he is fast growing up despite a lack of food. Hunger is a perilous thing, but because we ration everything, and work very hard, we are never more than a little hungry after a meal. But how long this can be sustained is unknown."

Rizwana nodded sympathetically. "Say on."

"We are wondering if we could send him to you, of afternoons a few times a week, you who are well versed with your letters in English and Dari and the Book, so that he may learn from you, how the world turns with language? And with arithmetic too, and with numerals? I only pray for a favourable answer."

The woman broke eye contact and just sat mending for a while, pondering something, looking almost glad. "Of course," she said quickly before too much time had passed. "It is an honour for a woman who has no children of her own, to teach others'."

"I would be grateful. Which are the days that would be best for you to teach him?"

"Tuesdays and Thursdays, to be sure. And the time, anytime in between 2:30 and 4:30 in the Afternoon, between two of the calls of the muezzin."

"So can I send him from next week?"

"Surely, you can. But before that happens, if it is possible, please give me a second copy of his book, so that I may prepare in how to instruct him about it."

It is in the commandments that the Godly must never blanch, never panic, for he always provides a way if his believers pray to him. And although she was deprived, she was willing to sacrifice a day or two's meals of her own for her son's education, so that he could grow up to be less so than her. "Surely, I shall ask the teacher for one and bring it to you."

Rizwana had seen a pause when she had asked Homaira about the book. Not wanting to be the cause of another hardship on the poor family, she said.

"This old body requires more movement than merely housework these days. Mayhap it be that I will walk to the school myself tomorrow and purchase a book from the teacher on my own funds as I am honoured to have a new student."

The girl mother, 24, who was almost a woman, ran and hugged the old crone Rizwana, 70, who despite her age, shone with the fierce lit beauty of a winter landscape with spires of ice on pine-tops and dried grass whorling in wheelbarrows up and down its flanks, as it would look in a flash of lighting, like the lords' face when he appeared on a cloud at the Pentecost.

"Wait," said Rizwana. "Your son is not the only one who needs to be taught. Do you come as well, and learn how letters, runes and cuneiform are formed with the feather quill pen and Chinese

obsidian ground ink, and how news is inscribed, sentences scrawled, and paragraphs deciphered in the tradition of reading from right to left, as well as left to right, as they do in Punjabi (Gurmukhi), Hindi and English. Then perhaps you will be able to read the subtitles of film scripts on those songs the young people watch in the theatres of towns."

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Homaira was scrubbing Ayesha jan's new school uniform. It was blue with a chequered sash and three criss-crossing stripes on the hem.

"Homaira jaan?" Rahim Khan called after her. She looked up, her face strained looking up from the clothes she was scrubbing and rinsing. "Yes?"

'I am leaving the deposit for Ayesha and Aref's school fees in your morning satchel, alright?"

"Yes, alright." She thanked him inwardly, and returned to her washing. "Don't forget to take your lunch to the cart launch as I will be at the school today and thus not able to bring it to you."

"Point taken," said he and tied his pakoul (turban) round his head with as much dignity as he could muster.

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Hekmatyar's men were coming.

"Do you promise you'll come back for us?" Irfan asked his mother. "I promise," she said. "I promise I will come back for you two." In a tizzy, she packed up whatever rent she had outstanding in her leathern satchel, and proceeded swiftly out of the doorway of the house, to make good on it, before she came back for the children. "Keep out of sight," said she, "and stay away from the fire to stay safe. When your father comes back, let him in."

Rahim Khan entered. "Mama has gone to Hafiz uncle's house," said Ayesha. "To make good on the debts to Hafiz uncle's wife."

"Let's play snow blizzard," said Aref. "Untill Amma comes back." They crept outside in to the snow, leaving trails of footprints behind them, plodding in the dust of white crystals as elephants would, their shoes coming unstuck like shovels upending clods of earth ploughed up for seed in sowing time. Ayesha packed the snow into bricks, and laid these paving stones along the front of the fort-line. Then she topped the layers, building the walls up to the height of her ribs and knelt behind it, throwing balls out like an armory of gunfire.

Aref ducked, stooped and scooped up some more snow into his claw-like hands, throwing it at his sister, who hid behind the fortress she had built, squeaking and giggling; much of the snow was simply landing behind her. It melted slowly from the heat of the impact, trickling down the sides of the fortress, some powder, some water cascading down her skin, leaving streaks of blistering cool in its wake.

Homaira hurried back, chattering in the cold. Her hair was askew beneath her veil, strands were poking out of the bun and straying from behind the knot and pincer on her head she had on to hold it up. She swirled off the hairdo and redid the hair in a hurry. "Come," she said we must hurry. She strapped a bundle to her back and tied the strings infront of her chest, Rahim Khan strapped two to his back and fiddled with the strings round his breastbone. "Oh! There is so little time," she said mournfully. "So little time to get prepared." She put a small pot on the fire of rice to boil it with an opened egg to feed the children.

She stirred distractedly, telling Rahim Khan, "I don't know if I should pack the rosewood chest, it's so fragrant, yet it's so heavy!" "Do you want to take it along with you?" asked Rahim Khan. "I don't

know how wise that would be." "I think we should leave it," she said. "Indeed, said Rahim Khan sorrowfully, "I was thinking that that was something we should leave."

"I shall pack the last of our belongings," she said, "With great care." She slowly lifted the Quran and the English novels along with Hafiz's poetry onto a sturdy prayer mat and onto one of her dagris, pulled up each of the corners and twisted them together in a flourished knot, neat and scuffing.

Hekmatyar's men came running up the hills and Homaira, Rahim Khan Aref and Aischa slipped out of the door and melted down the hillside, come what may, for whenever till whatever, in among the reeds and grasses, the bulrushes and the rough rolling igneous stones wet by the cascading stream.

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"And … we are here!" seeing him, Homaira smiled up at her father for the first time in three years. "There is so much to say and so much to do, where shall we begin?"

"The war has indeed brought us together, said her father to Rahim Khan, his yellow teeth smiling sardonically. "Glad to see you safe and sound. And glad to see that your husband has kept away from the fighting."

"Oh, he didn't," said Homaira. "He went for defense at the front line when they chased us away from home, but I brought him back as you see and he is alive," she said.

"I hope you have taken good care of one another these years," said Habibur Rehman seriously to Rahim Khan. "Just as I and your mother did when she was alive."

"I do remember," said Rahim Khan. "Khala Parina was the kindest, most hospitable auntie and taught her daughter well to make naan and daal. Sometimes I still remember the way she used to feed us through the window near the chullah of the delicacies, or just simple food, she had made, when we were whizzing around the paddock, playing and trampling. It was kind of her to feed us, though, Lord knows, budgets were always tight in this village."

"And then you grew, and you grew until you no longer fit in your childhood clothes, and you had to take in tailoring to make sure you did not perish from the cold."

"Indeed, I do remember. But it certainly is hellish being a tailor without knowing how to read, and so I took lessons beneath a tree from a man who was willing to teach me."

"You work hard," he said. "I told you before you left you'd have to be prepared to work in the apple orchards when picking time comes, climbing of ladders and many of which teeter and fall, till you crack your sconce on the floor, have your hands and face scratched by the thorns, have apple blossoms in your hair, bees sting your eyelids and your cheeks, your fingers blasted by fungus and by rot."

"And not to mention the frost?"

"Indeed, that too. And never leave until the harvest day is done, lest the merchandise or fruit rot on the branches or fall to bruises on the ground. But you have worked, and have prospered, although you have at least thirteen years left until your children are grown and off on their own. And so I'm proud."

"The spring laughs with your blossoms,

Which she played with and set afloat upon the bubbling river."

Let's catch the morning light," said Homaira hearteningly to Aref and Samaira, who were just waking. "Rise and shine. Aref sat up, Samaira and he stood and stretched almost in unison. "Here, said Homaira, fetching a pail of water. "Brush your teeth by chewing on these sticks."

"Now we will create the day," she said. She gathered up their shoes and buttoned up their jackets for them, swathed her hair in a scarf and set outside taking them both by hand.

Their feet stepped upon the velvet of the mossy carpet on the worn path, flanked by olive plants and growing oleander shrubs with pointed leaves and flowers of blood or red ochre colour, butterflies flitted up and down the bushes, carrying pollen from one blossom to the next.

The gusts of wind went through their nostrils like storms, and puffs of grey-white cloud emerged in condensation, like the trains of smoke from a steam engine. They hugged their jackets tighter round themselves and picked up their pace. The eucalyptus trees hard by swayed and groaned and guttered in the wind. Homaira broke two small twigs of leaves from the branches and wove them into wreaths, for the children's heads, who sniffed them and hastened trotting with their mother down the mountainside until their reached their aunts' cabin.

"Noor! Oh, Nuriya!" she hollered after her sister. "Daughter of the moon!" she said teasing her. "Come and see whom I have brought today, and to help thee with thy chores!"

"Oh, I thought the light would wend someone to me today," said Noor, her delighted cheeks and forehead appearing in the doorway all of a sudden. "Don't you call me strange names. Are you well enough to help me?"

"Finer than ever, because I come to see you, and through His grace."

"Just what I was asking for! I was making a pot of lentil soup, if you and the children would like to partake of some when I have finished getting it ready."

Her children hid behind her skirts, shy.

"Come on Aref, come out and play with Noor's son, Irfan," Homaira encouraged him. She took him by the hand, bobbing on her heels and led him across the packed earth floor to the muslin hanging in the doorway, flapping and flying like a goose's tethered wings.

Irfan bloomed, crawled on the ledge outside the door, playing with a clay horse, riding it this way and that, making it trot and prance all the way across the moss coloured beam.

Junaid skipped, hopped an danced across the fresh green lawn like a deer's baby, a lithe fawn with a white tinged tail and spots, flecked with little dots, dressed to play and swim.

Irfan said, "I am Chingiz Khan, and this is my faithful horse, attired for war. And this, he indicated a walking hand, "Is my faithful charioteer Saleem." Saleem leads the horse to a watering hole, a small puddle in the ledge, and the horse stoops to drink from it, splashing through it and wading, galloping and spraying Saleem and Irfaan with chittering droplets.

"These are all the plains I am going to conquer. These are all the fields tilled by my lieges. These are all the crops that I will feed them with, but I will share it all with you, Aref Jan."

Aref thanked him and raised a stick, planted it in the ground and gathered others, to lay a sweet circle around it, and then rucked rods and twigs to fit from the top of the center stick to the joints between the circling ones. "This will be our tent," he said, "A central Asian tent, though less precise and more like a wooden cairn, or a stone henge."

"I am Aref Khan and I am a messenger of the tidings of peace. I lead the sheep to drink from waterholes as sweet as honey, to graze from grasses scattered with spicy clover, to nose among mushrooms as shrewd as buttons, and to play and gambol among trunks as wide as rivers.

I am your friend, Chingiz Khan, and I will lead you to victory. But we will conquer the souls of conquerors with love and implore them with duty, we will discard the chaff with strainers of tears,

weeping for mis meanders, and straining our arrogance to the top of the sieve, we will pour them off into the waterfall, and will lead them and their subjects to a land of freedom and brotherhood.

Noor and Homaira were seasoning the soup with tamarind, green lentils and wild coriander that Noor grew in her back garden, to be sopped up with naan that afternoon for lunch. Stirring the ladle in and out of the bubbling concoction, throwing in chopped onions and halved chillies which Noor had purchased from an Indian merchant plying spices in the village market fair.

In the presence of only other women and children, Noor pulled her red hair back, with her clawed hand, for she did not have to wear a veil under the cool roof of her own house, and some strands came unravelled like stray strawberries falling out of a basket of vegetable wares.

Homaira thought a bit and said: "My son Aref … he is very aggressive. He attempts to lead other children in naughty escapades when their mothers such as I and Sakina are not looking."

"Have you tried talking to him about it? You must try to explain to him that his actions should be in the interests of the group and not simply himself and his friends."

"Well, put that way, I suppose that might work," said Homaira. "And also perhaps by telling him that it makes me sad."

Although I am sometimes temped to it, dear sister, I understand that gossip, is not good," said Noor. "It is a punishable offence in God's eyes. Those who look behind their shoulders at what sinners do, will be called to reckoning on the day of judgement. Let whomsoever must complain about greviances do so in a dignified manner, not stooping to the depth of the perpetrator of the crime, and bring true justice."

Homaira continued, "For it is mentioned in the Book that the righteous are not among those that engage in idle conversation. Although some conversation is certainly necessary, for the unburdening of the mind. I have seen and appreciate that, when someone visits you, you do take the trouble to spend time with them, even if they are only your neighbour and not your own relative."

Noor nodded and said: "Indeed, it is hard to help not doing that. Tis difficult to sit idly by when someone, infused with the energy of the righteous is working alongside one's own company starved soul. Everyone has something valuable to share, and something which you could only learn from them because of their unique journeys. Some people speak of their experiences like vegetable vendors opening their baskets of brinjals, lady fingers and cauliflower, French beans, potatoes and onions, arranged in a colourful whorl. But, to the disciplined soul, their experiences are far more precious than these wares. Not only are they are pearls in the crown of the Emir of the Universe, bells on his anklets, the wind that enervates His nostrils, but they are the marrow that runs through the bones of the seasoned listener, and there is no experience of another that a real human being, a mahatma will separate from his own experience. And so, I say, shut not anybody out of your life, unless they cause you pain or danger."

Homaira said: "And even then, be strong enough to climb under the layers of dirt and filth, to that wellspring to which they may be lead to drink, as horses who follow the riders' orders and partake of rivers' waters when they pass them by.

Noor said: "And know that it is the Lord who must be glorified in this, that a sinner, a transgressor, and a subvertor and one astray was made to turn to Him. It is well to become strong yourself so that others can lean on you."

Homaira said: "Indeed, the fountain of eternal life is whence we spring, but we must continue revisiting it so that we can drink from it now and then and be refreshed and grateful. Its sprays flash like diamonds or silver droplets raining from a willow tree that has been plunged under a lake's current by a storm, and recovers its erectness in a hyperbola of suppressed trunk once the force

abates. It rains droplets of river water onto the banks across the channel, like a thousand sardines leaping in a school out of a gorge, back into the slipping stream.

“The properties of these droplets are: rejuvenation, obedience to the correct word and almighty laws of spirituality that govern the universe, courage and success in one’s endeavours and livelihood, which God bestows on those travelling on the ordained path to follow Him.

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White Champa, black water

Silver ripples, rising moon

Cold wind, sudden shivers

Rising bread, blowing shoon and shoelaces .

Straggling, scrawny arms peeking out

Of the sleeves of a shirt

A shining braid which she wove of her hair

Through her slender, nimble fingers,

Brushed with the wind.

And blowing sand and rising dirt.

A shack of branches, a roof of hay

A door encrusted with barnacles and clay.

“I shall lead you by the hand,” she said, to unity of creed and practice; to the harmony and integrity of thought and action. Nothing consume that is not earned, nor anything do that is not profitable in mind, spirit, or in flesh.

“Nothing drink, she said, that is not life to the soul, that is water, and nothing speak that giveth not life to the fellow human being.

Measure is medicine, though thou yearn for much, and you are entitled only to that much for consumption that makes you healthy and saves you from mis-ease.

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This is how their meeting had gone when Noor, she had heard tell Homaira and her family were visiting.

“We’re sisters,” said Noor, smiling, reaching out to hug Homaira. Noor had a cap of long, winding red hair and Homaira a fudge coloured mop of golden locks which they both hid under emerald and sorrel coloured hijabs contrasting with the hues of their straws like grass and sunlight, or green leaves smoking with fire.

Noor was tall and lissome, with round calves, her features greatly influenced by the upturned eastern noses of Bamiyan and the long eyes of suppressed sadness that were bright as stirring spring pools in the autumn light that filtered through the fig and cypress trees’ canopies, illuminating the dust motes that floated above the shrubs and the rippling water, but with a calm that surpassed these waves.

Homaira's features were sharper, evener, like the mountain crags of Panjshir, a nose like a sickle moon, and cheeks that had once been like roasted apples, but now were like hollow caves dark with tangling roses in the dusk. Her eyes were amber and penetrating, she could see far and wide, and far beyond, stretching to the horizon, could discern unfamiliar shapes and emotions in strangers so that she hoped she could almost read their minds, understand a little bit of their stories, and she often spoke to strangers, getting them to tell their tales and always reciprocated with some tales of her own.

Each story she digested into a novella of her own, in her mind which would beautify and adorn her day, widening her perception of humankind, till it was as broad and trickling as the tides of the sea, variegated as the texture of corals, deep as the welkin above, into which birds careened and screamed in flight.

The layers upon layers of what she knew would gather like shawls or sheepskins in a Turcoman merchant's bundle, evening by evening, enriching her perception and giving a direction to her day, to understand the strange architecture of the meetings of fate and the structures of personal narratives, like the dome of an onion with many ethereal layers of bulbs. It was like this: by evening they philosophised, but by day, they worked.

When Homaira hugged Noor, they both wept, and would not let go of each-other for a very long time.

"My son wants to become a history teacher," said Homaira. "And my daughter, either a dressmaker, or a catcher of birds, or what do you call that? A skyentist."

Noor said: "Are you attempting to make these things possible for them?"

And Homaira answered: "In as much as we can, in as much as we are both uneducated and unschooled, in as much as we are poor and hardworking, we are doing, sending them to a learned woman a few times a week to help them crack their school lessons."

And those old adages, sayings of old kept alive through tradition, through painstaking labour, like that of cleaning a stove of oil and soot or rolling naan with a pin, Homaira told these to Noor even as she unburdened the tale of the time they had spent apart the past three years.

And they said: "Ah, to suffer the blade of the sword, and to suffer the evil of fire; yet to maintain one's love like the flowing of a river, is a much narrower pursuit by far."

Which was a translation from a Kabir poem. "Wah," said Noor, but that is only true for a person that does not profess that his Life is the Beloved."

"The shuttlecock of the sportsman flies so far, the feather of the eagle so high, but which remains in the air longer depends upon which is enlivened by a mind, a spirit, an intelligence that is willing to negotiate the vagaries of the wind like a skilled and benevolent pilot."

"Leaves are jewels, true wicks of a flame, producing sugar and wheat, spinning from the sun, curling to nothingness, they sacrifice everything for their children and reach the cusp of perpetuity, they cling wherever there is a cliff, they grow where there is rain.

Sheaves of wheat, ears of corn, bucking tails of oats and millets, the sides of the field like arrows when the breeze blows, oh storm, take not my crops away when you have made them grow with your tears in months passing; I am sure you have an heart, an eye, and will not."

"Galdioli, chrysanthemums, lilies, hibisci freshening the garden, jewels better than pearls, flowers better than gold, you are my crown, for I was doomed to be poor, yet toil, work and bread gladden my days, and make them long and warm.

"Rain, darkness, cloud and thunder, only make me feel the keenness of my love again, like the chafing cold of the wind stirs blood into her cheeks. I must make a dress to keep the cold from her."

Noor took her baby onto her left hip and sat down on the charpoy and bid Homaira take off her veil and sit. They stared up into the smoke-hole into the sky that was quickly darkening and filling with stars.

Homaira twirled a fishbone between her fingers and it came alive through the moonlight, which sent shivering spokes down and through it like sinews, needles of fin and scale.

Noor said: "What I remember best is the swilling of water from one clay pot to another when we were sharing it between households, so scarce is it in this region that we are almost always thirsty. Hauling two pails from the brook to the house, where the children and we washed dishes on bricks, pouring mugs of water over our hands from the bucket, and watching it sparkle and cool our heated skin and rinse the vessel, sometimes giving us goose-flesh in winter. Do you remember that?"

"Indeed, I do."

"And somehow I feel that we are nothing but boats journeying between one dock and the next and that was how it was meant to be in the first place. I shall give you Shayari too."

"When your mother cooks food, help her. You never know if your mother in law will give you food once you are married."

"Be grateful for whatever you obtain for that is the crown of satisfaction and contentment. Grasp not, want not, waste not, weep not, but in everything apply moderation, that you can walk upon the flows in a graceful manner, like the water walking prophet of God."

Noor pulled Homaira's cheeks in the classic Afghan way; Homaira smiled as her cheeks grew warm and reddened, and Homaira leaned this way and that with a grin that she felt would almost break her face, giggling.

The cart-puller came by, carrying wheat, barley, rice, and sandalwood, incense, poppies, opium, hookahs, cutting boards, vessels, mirrors and silver trinkets, said, are you full with gifts today, or shall I oblige?

We are full, was the cheerful answer, but they gave him water and he stopped for a chat.

"The ones who do embroidery for these kurtas, shalwars and bedsheets," he said. "Would love to use your sewing hoop anchors so they could keep their fabric straight and taut as they as they brocade with the needle. Do you make them?"

"My brother in law whittled them from yew, from the cast-off branches of the cherry tree, near the gulley, the channel between our land and the land of Gul Mohammed," she indicated the margins of her husband's and her and her children's land. "Shall I ask him to carve a few other pairs, for you to sell to them abroad in the province? I am sure they would buy them from you, if they want them so, and he charges but a pittance."

"Aye, they would. They make sure you put more than an evenings' worth measured labour into them, or they won't hold. They had better fit into one another like a mussel fits into a shell. And the wood of which they are made, must not snap. I may buy them for little, but I don't want to have to make my purchase twice," said the peddlar, whose name was Kahaan.

"It is good workmanship for a man, who is scared of knives, though his wife, she may be a scullery maid," said her sister, defensively.

"I concede that. I'll not heckle, nor haggle with you. Make sure to burn the bakhoor in the lamp, and smear its lamp black on your eyelids and cheeks to ward off the evil eye," he said. 'Although the

third eye of the woman when seeing, sears the evil in the muggy air and the misted clearings with light, as the Hindu's revere, with a bindi on the forehead, Kali's beauty spot, between her brows, in the place of a frown."

"How many rivers do you cross in between the sewing women and us?" asked Noor. "How many bands should we suture, to make bodices and bandanas for those who are working in fields in the sun?"

"And would you buy them from us?"

"I would, surely I would. And the workers would buy them from me.

"If they saw them, they would buy them."

"The beautiful elder wood, the dark freshness, the smoothness, the grip."

"I think they will make the money."

"How many will you commission?"

"Twelve, as of now, I say."

"Twelve, then, it is, if you come back in three months, they will be there for you to buy."

"They will save the money by staving off heatstroke, keeping the money from the quack's purse who attempts to cure them with his witchcraft."

"Indeed, people can scarce work in the open these days, with the Mausom (seasons) changing on us like a compass arrow flying from point to point, turning north to south and vice versa.

Salaaming, and sealed on their promises, the man left the two sisters, to produce what they would then trade and barter.

"Remember when we used to tickle our mother?" asked Noor, twisting her white cotton thread around her caramel finger so that she would make knots for the needle." And then she would laugh so much and let us stand alternatively on her stomach, which was hennaed with many patterns of curling, curving tangling vines, and tree trunks, when we were that lightweight, to catch her hands and sing: "Sailboat, sailboat, over the deep blue sea.". That's where I keep getting the idea that life is a journey, although I must now be the sea to my children, upon whose strictures and waves they journey, in the shadow of my clouds and care, as they said, under the feet of mothers is heaven. And only now I understand how she felt cooking for us, to feed us that we would not be hungry, working in the fields with father, in the hot dry sun and air, and playing with us in the cold, cold winter, throwing and making snowballs and rolling in the dusty ice, the blowing knifelike wind."

"We are not leisured women," said Noor. "But everyone knows that when the sun is directly overhead, until it reaches a nadir of at least three o'clock, it is not advisable to stir out, but to accomplish one's housework in the cool dark beneath one's precious and lifesaving roof, be it of thatch, shingle, corrugated iron, or wood. Let us sit talking for a little while longer before we venture out to apply cow dung to the furrows, as well as the river and well water to irrigate the crops our fields."

Noor reached under the charpoy and extracted a fresh wooden tablet, cut from a sapling felled in a storm. Characters engraved on it like etchings of days on a wooden stick, the hollow lines sharpened by strokes of black ink. "This is a poem I wrote about your baby. Listen. 'The tiger eyes of the sleeping child, like a cat hiding and coiling to spring from the bushes. He will grow to be a leader of his family, bringing enlightenment and faith to those living in ignorance; freedom, joy to a society of communal living with profits shared and work divided to a people in whom hierarchy is ingrained. They will know how they have been oppressed, subjugated, and will learn how to remedy it, to

remake their fortunes, living as proud, autonomous and strong, making the fabric afresh from each thread which they spin from wool."

Fireflies soaring in a net above the river, a lantern of glow-worms shining on a tree. Yellow autumn leaves hanging from branches like coins in a nomadic woman's headdress. A cross lit with thorns which have been set fire to, and a burning bush smoking away at high speed. What do all these things stand for? The cross that must be carried everyday, lest it burn. The fact that punishment for idleness comes like swift justice; the lord sending his streaks of lightning down on it, like kites swooping for prey which they rapidly consume.

Although the lord wants you to be strong, yet he does not desire you to be strong only for strength's sake, but rather for the sake of your work, your calling, that would glorify him, sustain you, and earn you salvation. If you have eaten, then walk, or dance, to build your strength. But after you have walked, if you dance, or vice versa, God's wrath will be on you because given sustenance, you did not work, strayed from the purpose for which he gave you strength.

When you go to market, do yourself the favour of begging a newspaper of a *seth* and read of the struggles of other farmers and working men and women so that you may know you are not the only one who suffers, nor your village, for you will know of others' struggles from your neighbours and the village jirgas; and you may cast in your lot to help them or through by prayer and an occasional donation that you will not say pinches, you may indeed decide to band together to form a powerful group that will oppose the dominant stance and demand reform; know always that your work, if it falters, your credibility is lost. Be your best self wherever you go, but you must develop your crafts at home. If you do not, you will be vulnerable to exploitation by industrialists who prey on so called 'free unbonded" labour of people who have lost their tenacity to their land or been alienated from the raw materials or skills their craft requires of them, or of the markets into which they used to sell, and the industrialists can be as bad as landlords. So hold onto whatever land you have, whatever work you possess, whatever skills you have learned, although you may want to continue to learn and be active in politics your whole life, by always stating your opinion among others of your kind, so that your views may reach the common one, all this, always keeping in mind that character is a most precious thing, hard to build up but easy to tear down."

"Tell your husband to stop smoking," said Noor. "Or it'll not be pretty."

All these things which we grow, she said. Like tobacco and areca nut and opium, have addictive properties as the western scientists have proved. One takes them, ingests them, breathes them, and one gets a draught of what it would be like to be in heaven, flying among the clouds of white cotton fleece. But ingesting them on a daily basis, is a sure way to go to hell in the long run.

Why not live instead on the intoxication of the cold fresh air, the strong sunlight that blinds your eyes when you look up into it, the excitement of talking of new experiences, and of the ivory hue of cloud piled on top of itself, and the dark curls of nimbus, that hurls its burly arrows of rain and hail earthwards, the mystery of the grains of wheat that blow flurrying-ly in the wind? Resplendent in one's hands, they give proof of wealth, better than any coinage, and they are beautiful like the vision of work articulated, the truthfulness which is better than apples of gold in pictures of silver? And when the crops fail, aren't there many arrangements to make, such as deals with neighbours, to secure a crop time around and to bring in food even in debt? Is not the task at hand so enormous as to warrant full involvement?

Why not climb upon the ladder of watching, one's day unfolding like a hibiscus while one works, flower from a bud, its wrinkles giving way to ruffles, its blood red and soft pink, giving way to streaks of moon white, that form paths down its petals towards its stamens, to lead the bees to sip its nectar and gather its pollen to later scatter among the other flowers?

Soar upon the pinnacles of light, the pentacles of ether, the snowflakes of silver. One does not delude oneself, one simply imagines.

Truly, I tell you, as the messiah said, unless a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot be born again, even in the case of an addiction. You must tell your husband to purge his system of the toxins by drinking lots and lots of water and refraining from holding that smoking stick near his nose … and the time saved and the money saved from ceasing to buy the tobacco to roll, is not quite trivial. All of us struggle to make ends meet, just as bees struggle to store up enough honey and royal jelly for their larvae babies and mother queen for the winter."

They both opened the wooden window shutters near the bed and peered out of it keenly. A woman emerged from the marshes, her ribs and collarbones like one streak of lightning, her arms and muscles like scallop shells twisting in the morning tides, with blood red hair and a body straight as a cross, her eyes gleaming malachite at them, kind, narrow, lambent, like lanterns spilling, light from a window of darkness, from a distance. The form made its way across the darkening dessert, like a cardinal fluttering against the wind, flurrying slowly, picked its way among the rising hills nearby, skirting round the shrubs, their mother. Half starved and leaning on a stick now, bent, at other times, walking sprightly on the broad plain, was she, clad in Tibetan cotton, whose grain ran rough and against the current of her flowing hair.

"You must talk to everyone," she said to her daughters. "Take everyone's opinion, and move on from there. Always evaluate yourselves, measure yourselves against your ideal standards, and then modify your procedures accordingly. Know that if you work towards good ends, you are unstoppable, and your work is unbeatable, as long as it continues to benefit others and yourselves, giving you succour as well as satisfaction. But speak about your work, what purpose it accomplishes, how better it could be done, what obstacles it faces, and whether those purposes are indeed noble or expedient in the proximate sense as well as the ultimate, that is in the short term as well as the long term, for yourself, your families, your clans and your peoples.

Someday you will find that the entire human race has become united, throbbing like one animal, breathing with one breath, the breath of creation, of the joy of making what they need and the happiness and pride that comes from supplanting others with such.

Let not idle chatter come anywhere near your lips, and ward off evil of idleness like a flame wards of wild animals, or a black mark on a maiden's cheek, and ringing her eyes, wards off witchcraft. There are however some forms of witchcraft that are benevolent, and can be used to salvage others' strength and your own resolve."

The birds flying and circling, are God's witchcraft, mind-craft, skill of creation. They know one anothers' flight by sensing the currents in their own bodies, and they know where to fly and circle and home in upon the earth because they have a sense of its magnetic currents. Thus, warm brown feather upon warm silver feather and beating wing, and throbbing heart and sinew, transports the birds from a place of the posts of winter to a place of the posts of rising hills in the sun, summery climes.

If humans would but sense the currents in their own selves, in the depth of their sinew and flesh, as well as that of their brethren, and follow where these currents lead them, they could maintain peace, build their relationships upon the dock of the lords' love and sail in the direction of the forewards stream of life and labour and swinging joy of free and unfettered movement. They would then always know how to make themselves whatever they need, what is appropriate to say to one another, and words would come out of the depths of truth, in "ever widening circles of thought and action," as the poet speaks, and "tireless striving will stretch its arms towards perfection, and the clear stream of reason hold sway" among the fishes that relish to swim in its midst, and spin in the currents of water of the laughing river. Do not sit still in the boat, but pump your arms to man the oars, and do not sway right and left lest you cause your vessel to capsize. But keep your eyes upon

the golden lantern tree at the end of the river, which perhaps you do not yet see, but will come to dock at in time.

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The first day, they bent among the furrows and scattered seeds in a straight line; it took them half the day to finish with the full field. The next week, when the saplings had sprouted, they fitted them with tall sticks next to the stalk and tied them with cotton string so the plants would wend their way around them, or grow erectly.

They had no choice but to pull out the weeds that took root on the first week, cast them into a fire and spread the ashes on the furrows.

Settled again, Homaira was picking grapes from the arbours to dry them into raisins and keshmesh to later put into the kheer. She clambered onto the arbour, her skirts swirling about her, her earrings chiming and her anklets clamouring. The high wind dislodged her veil and spread her scarf on the breeze like a banner or a trailing ribbon, and she alighted from the stone ledge like a heron landing, her basket full.

Ayesha egged her on giving her the slip when she bent down to look at a pair of mushrooms, said, "Amma, don't get distracted." She then took a piece of white linen, one of her veils and laid it out on the ground and spread the grapes out upon it. Bending down, she arranged them in fantastic patterns, curling , curving, triangular, making a mosque of emerald fruits, while squatting on her heels, Ayesha and Aref looking on as they played marbles on a beige handkerchief on the jade hued grasses. Out infront of them, spread the magnificent plains, olive trees, apple orchards and wide vineyards, rice fields and wheat fields, peaches and apricots.

Homaira thought of how the blood rushed into Rahim Khan's face when he pulled carts and how they would all like to eat Keshmesh. Of late, they were always hungry, poverty being a process and not a condition, and she doubted he ever got to eat enough these days. They all ate together when he came home, she could tell how cautious he was, making sure portions were small enough to tide them over for the next meal or the next day. Yet there was a frugality about the life that was gave them direction, whatever they ate, they used up, and they continued on into empty nothingness of their bellies always with a task at hand.

There was a wild masti about Rahim Khan when he had his shoulder braked up against the handle of the cart and was pulling it, as though he were throwing a spear with a thrust of his shoulder delivering ruby apples and golden fleece to God.

Oft than not he sat for lunch at the crossroads with the other working men of the township, talking with them about the rising price of rice and onions, sharing a joint of hemp, or talking the cart puller's prattle about the changing lights at eventide and dawn, the three o'clock rays penetrating their eyes, making windows of their pupils. And when he was inspired to do so, he sat playing the lute with its twangling strings, or twiddling his thumbs muttering (nurturing) couplets under his breath, which he would later recite to her at dusk, hoarse voiced and eager, like a true poet reciting his lessons to his muse.

The price of onions, rising,

What will we eat with our naan?

You and I colliding,

Will fire start from the spark?

Walking, walking on the road,

Passers by are veiled and turbaned

How will I know it is you who have passed?

I will know by your limp, or your gait.

Guess who I met on the road to the market?

Muhammad, although I didn't know it was him,

His eyes were like jewels on that

Star studded night, or like pools of

Understanding, set in the crown of an Emir.

Like the jewels in the epaulets or crown of the

Prince or steward, the horseman, of the mare Earth the stables of the Realms and the confederations, the marshes, the drained tillages of the Universe.

He brought out his little flute, his piccolo, and placed it at his lips, allowed his fingers to fly hither and thither, this way and that, fluttering, dancing down its length like beating doves pecking at bluebells or hummingbirds drinking nectar from morning glories.

She put her arm around him as he played, he swayed, she pulled him close and sang, whistled, keened, whispered, cupping the music in her mouth, tossing her scarf in her hands.

Then they both rose and twirled to the flights and trills of the notes and song. Their hands curved in ruffles, swathed in snaking crescents; they stamped her feet in staccato thundering, a clicking and a darting, a clacking, a barrage, a flood of pounding.

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Chapter 6. Talking to One Another

My heart is so small

It's almost invisible

How can you place such big sorrows in it?

Look," he answered.

"Your eyes are even smaller,

Yet they behold the world."[4]

Say: "Our hearts are like a frozen lake, which melts

And turns into many rivers."[i5]

The rivers, spread like vessels of blood, and water, like a vine

Through our bodies and across the countryside.

"Rivers, walking and talking,

Lapping against the sand in caressing waves,

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[4] Rumi poem from 13th Century

Shivers up and down my calves for seven winters I spent away,

And glimmering, shudders with the lingering drops of rain.

Braiding streams, coursing lees,

Whirlpools and eddies, bringing and depositing sands.

Welling, sinking, gathering, wrinkling

Like an old woman's toothless smile

Kind and complex

Like Arabian coffee beans mixed with Aztec caocao.

Or Tamilian cardamom with Brazilian brown sugar or molasses or bagasse

Grown with the toil of many men, who nick their arms and hands with the hacking of the sugarcane with their machetes.

I watch the world, wondering at the bands of red and black clay spluttering up to plug the tree's bark and bubble round the saplings, making their bark smooth and silky.

From behind the lattice of my fingers, my interlocked hands,

Rivers and elders and dream catchers

Made of fragrant cast-off branches

Carved with spears and strung with dyed string,

They sequester our dreams of what visions we will see, what acts we will plan,

When we meet to beat our washing against the cliff drop stones."

"My dear, I can only tell you to honour your father and mother. Do chores and tasks for them, give them of your earnings, and act in accordance with their wishes. Do not abuse their wealth or poverty by showing off or living licentiously in the land. Eat moderately, study diligently, take long walks, talk with friends, pray regularly and look after your body, mind and soul.

Green twigs and broccoli trees, waving in the breeze,

Stirring twigs and branches, whirling, dances,

Birds cheeping, tails sweeping,

Clouds milling, jackdaws swilling

In the sky like merry-go-rounds and Ferris wheels.

A bright light, emerging in the fight,

Between good and evil, beyond the weevils,

That gnaw apart the wheat to darts

And powder chaff, to starve the lass

And the lad who holds my hands and sings

Despite our hunger, watching slumber

And ever walks in lively springs.

This is the laughter of the spying rafter

We all sleep in a barn with pigs and cows, and spinning yarns

We spin, and growing yams and shearing rams

Ploughing the earth and bolstering the girth

Of trees with mosses and leaves,

Propels us onwards as we shift the stones and rocks

That lodge in others' fields.

Many an occasion hence have we never asked the question,

We love the lord and one another

The rocks and lees and skies and seas,

The tall waving branches and wide expanses

Why the lord loves us so, and we know,

Tis because he created us, but yet,

There are things we do not yet know.
Like why milk is white and cherries red,

Ravens black and snow is silver.

And walking hither, among the smoky

Trunks, and winding trails of crawling snails

Among the houses with ash and soot belched and trailing from their squalid chimneys,

We are a little folk and do not ask for what the grand folk have.

But perhaps we should.

A dirty pitcher of the sky-blue water

Filled with pebbles from the stream,

A board for kneading, oat flower and salt,

To make our rising bread is all we need.

And on and on the cloth we weave rolls on

In the biting winter

The chilblains maim our marginal toes

And makes our tall frames shiver.

Linen from papyrus reeds grown in Egypt,

We spin, sown in quiet, raised in tempest,

It is a bolt that never ends,

The sari of the captive princess who called on her cowherd friend

Even such are we, to save her,

When the louts in court harassed her

And she suffocated the King in court with her never-ending strings.

And ever the river of the turbine's quiver

And the shiver and shock of the wheels,

Grinding the wheat, the millet stones to bits

That rise like chattering spelling sheel on the wind.

Fairfolk and gnomes, working their bones

To gold like us serfs, whom everyone

Thinks are ignorant,

But we know of the Wonderlore and of the crafts and spores of life and mushrooms that ever is winning, so know.

We spin the chaff of the staff of life

Into paper screens to print our runes

For if you believe, although unschooled by gentry, we do use words

And characters to represent them,

Like the Chinese peasants use Cantonese

And hide messages in the wrist sleeves of shirts

And the secret signs are engraved in the shifting clouds

And the scratches on the inconstant moon

And the pith of trees,

And even their bark, where deer have gnawed on them,

And though written are always captive in our gusting cloudy breath.

Living and changing.

A wrinkle, a winkle, a four o'clock dimple

A cap of coins and bag of 'taters,

A plate of stiff stew and a satchel of yew

To burn at the stove, and an incense stick strew

The ashes to keep warm our sashes and grace the picture of our Lady of Dolores.

Rosary, work, confession, charity and prayer, penance, fasting,

Are her messages divine,

And how she changes penitent lives

Like her Son turned water to wine.

Those who cry and repent and cleave to her heart,

By praying and yearning with their own,

And thinking up kind deeds to meet the needs,

Of others and poetry to inspire them

They all receive the crown of life,

And reap for their families, what they have sown.

Patience, hard labour and honesty, she keeps and

Long locks are of the girl's high wealth,

Of the chestnut strawberry roan, stealth,

Shining like sparks and wood-shavings

In the afternoon; sun to ignite beneath the magnifying glass

She has just come back from geography class,

She twists them into a bun and covers them with a veil

A wimple, for she knows beauty in her clan is not to be seen by all and sundry

Lest it grow stale, but for her to be hale and hardy should be kept within a hijab, the painted

Indigo design tracing a child's cheek, Cahokia, the city of fires underground,

that inscribes igniting rapture into his soul, and keeps away the evil eye,

And that beauty is a sign of an inner river,

A wellspring of joy and song in quivering lips,

That she has forests and fields and skies inside,

And will always upon the lake ice glide

Only if she gives wood to the hearth and gives it as light to those who need light,

Will it not do harm, do harm.

Arms around her friend, her friend Safeena recites from the translation of a Tagore poem:

'Our narrow small river flows in bending lanes

In the month of boisakh, thigh height water

Crossing the river are cows, bulls and carts,

Even the two embankments on either side are fully submerged.

The sands gleam and sparkle, there is no deep marshy mud

On one side the woody trees erupt in white, sparkling flowers

Given birth to by the black ebony stems and trunks.

The shalik cheeps incessantly,

And in some hidden places, the jackals howl.

In some places are mango trees, in other, tal trees,

Giving shade to the village of idolatrous priests and priestesses (sic).

In the mornings and afternoons, after bathing,

In the pallus of their saris, catching tiny fish from the river,

And letting them go again.

The wives pile up their other clothes and go to attend their household work.

With the month of Ashad's rain clouds, the river is filled,

Breaking the embankments, the flow is chattering and roaring.

In the great noise, a cacophony rises,

In the glissades, the dense whirlpools frown and break and whirl.

On both sides of the woods, fall down the torrents of everlasting storm,

In the festival from the first rains, the whole village wakes up as if it is morn.

The cataracts breaking, as if the glacier's shatter."

But when will they understand that their hierarchy is causing others tears?

A swan's fluffy feathers,

A gooses down,

A lamb's golden fleece,

Snow fresh blown.

A pulling barge, stopping in its tracks,

Yanked by a saucy belligerent girl, my sister.

Her lips pressed together and her jaws bent upon her tilted neck,

A sleigh pulled and stopped,

A sled fled and jerked,

Her eye gleaming and boring into mine

"I won't go," she says. "If you don't let me meet Tariq, the charter of the stars and mosque dome designs, flowers of lapis lazuli inlaid pietra dura like little chinks of sunlight through the marble lattice. I don't live in a zenana and never will. So stop pretending I do."

I try to humour her without letting on whether I may or may not let her meet Tariq. We are bonded labour even on Saturdays and Gul Mohammed might not like it if we don't arrive back at the haveli on time to prepare their beds, their evening meal, and what's more to get up early enough to start working the next day, before dawn, to stoke the fires in their palaces and to knead the bread and clean the rooms and till the fields. And I am her older brother, but am responsible for my sister's safety and honour, to the extent that I protect her when we go outside of her home, just as a chaperone would do. So there. I told her that. She didn't like it.

"A shadow's veil face covering,

Is our neighbourhood square

In the vicinity, in the corner's

Tal forests in its 4 directions like walls.

A bending narrow lane plied

By girls carrying urns of water from a well

Bamboo leaning, swaying, swooping,

With a rushing clamouring, jhoru, jhoru sound

As the leaves crash like cymbals and nod

Against one another in the wind."

Now you know why men are actually much scareder folks than women. We have to look after them.

We have the safety and honour of the women to look after, which ultimately means our own safety and honour, because they are our flesh and blood, they cook for us, and we are officially responsible for them. We earn the food and they feed us through their own sincerity, hard work,and affection in their cooking, so they become a part of our own hearts' blood.

Nature plays a very important part in our lives, and some people find themselves asking, us, are you animals to trudge through the wilderness thus? But not really. We're as human as any of you, but because of the feudal system we just have to work much harder and eat much less.

And also, as peasants, we have our own form of logic, our own games, our own hobbies and passions. Even at work, when we are grazing sheep, we carve at wood with our pocket knives, to make a doll, to sell in the market square, or whittle a flute to play in the dusky rays of the evening, or play that very flue and tambourine while we dance, veiled by the distance, far from the eyes of the authorities and landlords, just for our own merriment and no one else's.

It must be said that I had no quarrels with Tariq. He was quite a decent fellow, I thought. At market, he often bought three seers of our milk and we often bought half a dozen eggs from him. And he gave us the freshest he had and didn't charge more than we could really afford. He had scruples. I could see why Beheshti liked him, too; he was a cheerful lad, erstwhile joyful, caring, though I knew he was often sad, because the landlords kept him alone as a guard during the day and he had no brothers nor parents, nor would they let him marry a wife. Every passing stranger was a brother to him. Large brown eyes, full of sorrow and reflection, a window to his

soul that was otherwise full of rain and storm and sun, buffeting the windows of his lashes, and gusting up the windowpanes, lashing them with hail. Only I and my sister Beheshti could make him laugh these days.

But he read of nights, after the day's work, and we gave her of the poetry we had written.

She returned it, too. Always after school as she would sit with her books, she would write a verse, or two, a rhyming verse about our lives, she said to turn our struggles into art was one of the gifts that God had bestowed on his toiling slaves.

Seven sculptures of walnut trees, bearing fruit like acorns, squirrels chattering, running up its branches, chewing on their nuts in their little grottoes, birds, mynahs chirruping, building nests among the leaves, in the crossroads between twigs and sky, feeding their young the tangy fruit flesh of the sour olive, and the unripe guava, and the soft chickoo.

*Running as though on a bridge between earth and sky, the red ants flame across the peeling bark of the tree, building dwellings in the holes of the bark, and in the stubs of branches fallen. ****

The mango tree, with seven long and lovely leaves on every apex of every twig, twigs forking into two from every sub-branch, mango flowers on pistils, blooming like russet brooms or bottle brushes in the old mango stamens, spiders have made a snarl, a whorl of them, and wrought their webs in a gossamer lattice that collects light and dust.

Some browning drying leaves are present, resplendent as dry palm leaves from which sitting mats for meditation and singing and meeting are woven.

Mangoes hanging from curling branches like jewels, or peaches, their curved surface green and fuzzy, tinged with red from the sun's touch.

Her skin was bubbly and fresh, sparkling like silver and copper leaves nestling among perky emerald grass, apple green fields, the malachite, alexandrite, spring pool shimmer was reflected in her eyes with a touch of olive, ivy, maple branched, sage, and her lips, chapped and bleeding, like popping strawberries whose seeds grow so large they sprout right out of the fruit flesh integument, piercing through the lotus pink core.

Her cheeks were the red orange rouge of snow monkey susu flowers, of bright, dark autumnal leaves hanging and falling like lanterns spinning and burning.

Her hair stirred like the fuzzy fronds of a coconut palm, her fingers like the strands of a fern.

Limbs harsh like the lashings of a makeshift shed, fastened and strung. Her face was sharp and gleaming like the full moon in an evening sky. Nature stopped and sniffed when she passed, sniffed at her fragrance. The sap in her limbs flowed and beat like veins of blood surging forth with the heart, heart, a fountain, lashing and steaming the birds, surrounding them in a sweet fragrance, incense. The leaves were stirring like sands blowing, and her strands spraying and foaming and streaming like auric gold and diamond glares on the sea of waves.

Japanese cherry blossoms pink with coral arrays, bananas and oranges, the tang of peel.

So sharp so clear are his strikes, as he chops down the tree, so hard, so pliable so stern so thunderous, so waiting so relentless, yet proportionate, reckless, hard. The tree screams, but he hears not.

The eagle bow and the turquoise sky, shooting forth sun arrows, lances soaring, flying, dripping like the wings caught in a cackling flame, wired against tame. Melting like snow balls, coursing down a mountain, tearing like snowflakes spraying on a salt wind.

The wombat's drool, glistening on the pine needles, the …

She, the tree, will live again, in the song of a choir, the gleaming wings of a swan, the texture of a wooden desk, the beads of a rosary, the wood of a window frame.

All three of them sparking, fraying, turning the wheel of the times. It is the enigma of the emerald lady star, with her pointed, graceful fingers and the hanging vesture/verdance of her garment. It is the sparkle of the shimmering dust that clouds the air, the mossy threads and thimbles, the pine needles and lily pad cymbals, the waving brush and savannah grass, paddy blown left wise by laughter, it is the mountain valleys of the shade that mists the sunlight on the open floor below you, lifting the sunlight from the open slats the swinging shutters of the window pane

Casting sunlight in the silken thatch from the smoke-hole

The moment calls, striking iron upon steel, steel upon iron, spatula's blades ringing against a hot stuck iron smithy flatbread pan, ringing silver, walling falling water sounds, shrill as a steam scream, a singeing weal. – a simmering whistle, a rod's yarn.

Weaving a diamond pattern of light, a lantern of incense, falling strands in a tapestry of lemon, tangerine and phoenix hue, spluttering and turning like a loaf of bread frying on a spit, roasting in mustard oil or butter.

The scattered grass, simmering and crackling in the heat, seeds popping, braided wheat-stalks bursting, a dew of ripening and summer.

They took the wind-dried washing and spread it out on the sun-soaked mat, smelling of old grass and seeds bursting in the heat, six squares of light slanted across the brown dirt floor, the bitterness of damp soot lingering round the extinguished hearth.

A turning, somersaulting folksong, full of joy and humility and affection, full of accountability and love.

Wilt thou come and harvest the barley crop with me? And we ought to open the gates to the gleaners! Before the untimely rains spoil the grain and the crop! We must allow them to glean, or part of our harvest will be wasted!

Watch! Watch the pouring rain descending on us all, like pearly ice sheets, like fogs and mists encircling!

And behold, the half rainbow; the water-gaw, above the highest mountain in the range, like a crown or halo to Mother Mary, pure and resplendent in snowy and mossy green robes!

Watch the sharecroppers, they are so thin they look like they'd waste into thin air, nothingness, as they walk abroad upon the cold air, muffled in sheepskin and woollen clothing, their dark hands reaching to the ground as their straight backs bend forwards, collecting the produce they have planted and tended, which waves like a green and gold forest of flag unbound by any string or binding. They slip the gleaned stalks of barley into a sheaf of linen carried by the other hand.

Many, many sharecroppers come. Do not stop them! They are in all entitled to a share of half of the produce of the land. Soon the snow and hail come in an ivory sheen; and ice encrusted on the cut stalk and stubble on the field, and the valley looks like a green mung bean with a white sprout coming out of it like a leek.

And the gleaners and sharecroppers flee for their homes, wrapping the harvested crop in their linen packets, they will store it in baskets under their rude shelters, and it will wait on them for the hard work they put into for growing it. And they will periodically make of it a flour, and of the flour, mixed with oil and water, a dough, and with the dough, both leavened and unleavened bread.

Dinnae be proud, owners of the fields; dinnae be proud that ye gave the gleaners and sharecroppers eat, for it was they that put in most of the labour to grow the food that will nourish both you and them. It is only just that they must take.

And the crop is like the unbounded hair of an ascetic seeker woman, or a housewife and she combs and braids it after washing it with rose essence and palm oil.

Hands dark red, with henna designs, paisley, dotted arabesque lined.

Around the water-gaw: a troupe of pigeons, one grey, with black striped wings and a multicoloured glittering neck/throat, shining blue, green, pink and purple, other worldly; the other pigeons with their whole bodies resplendent with the same spangling of colours, holding up a half rainbow, the other half obscured by a puffy raincloud like a goose or swan or duck's wings.

He spread his pakoul over Homaira his wife's shoulders so that it clothed her as she sewed in the burry red, lined with the claw like seeds which snatch their journey to a planting ground in the overwhelming musk of a nomad's clothes; leaned on his elbows next to her, twirling a straw in his hands.

"We had news from Tariquat today," he told her. Old Gholam Kader with the blackened teeth had brought word, his shoulder smashed against the cart's bulwark as its wheels shuddered, face suffused with blood as he strode on beside Rahim Khan.

"the rains were roiling in the North, before they came and rucked the rice, two thirds rotted on the field. We'd best plant early, if that is the grain we desire."

He twisted his moustache, both pained and eager in an instant, crinkled, edged with black tipped hawk's wing, or streaks of coal in a scorched-out mine.

"Well, what does the Begum say?"

"And none of that crop," said she, chastising the childish gleam with a laughing sulk in her muddy proud eyes. "The children grow better on millet than on rice, and it is not so delicate a plant that it cannot endure heaven's early torrents.

When she had been younger, she had mastered the art of invisibility, of drawing her energies within so completely that she lost relevance in the conscious-ness of the other, and therefore could not be seen. She was accessible to the eye, a girl the colour of tea with eyes like muddy pond water, hair and robes billowing around her rickety frame like stained clouds in a sapphire sky, or soiled canvas straining on a roof of a shack in a storm. But in the manner that she stood, a stork paused upon desert sands, or looked around or moved, it was as if she carried a jar whose contents she would not disturb. Not a lack of passion, but a soul burned so harshly it has relinquished all claims to fire for the sake of the charred wick it still must bear, meditates now in a watery world where fish weave through the slime and seaweed in speckled light and salt, clumsy hammer nosed things nosing furtively in the gloom. Yet, he noticed her, not as some queer meeting of the elements or as a maid who swept, but as a girl with a mind aloof, -- in plain sight, but yet unknown.

She would walk sometimes right behind a peanut seller, savouring the sweet burnt odour of the roasted peanut skin, and it was like having the moon follow him everywhere, no reason to look over his shoulder. A good thing, too, or who knew then about feasting an empty belly on the scent? And yet Rahim Khan did not attempt to encircle the wrist, or ensnare the heart which would have been like a bird in a cage, he would walk beside her with a quietness of gait that emulated her own, and when she wanted to speak, unfixed her with a deference of the eyes that gazed at the ground, saying to himself that sorrow itself was good for the soul.

This was how he had been before they had married: thin, hunched over, muttering to himself, lonely. A cotton chord of white thread for a cummerbund, purple flashes and emerald streaks looping

through the grain of the sickle moon shape beneath his nails, indigo and blue, peacock feather looping through his irises, his lashes curling like eloquent sparks, his teeth emerging like phosphorescent fangs, and himself, thin, hollow cheeked, his eyes like the cerulean sky, empyrean relentless, curving like a rainbow arc and the buttresses of a dove's globe flight from the heavens, alighting on a rushing stream.

His fingers had worked at carpentry like twisted elm chords, his hands like windows, arms like doors, his shoulders like wings, , his ribs and breast like the beaks of birds, opening and closing in great squeaks, his legs running and tripping like delighted twigs over the central Asian plain, daisy flower buttercup flecked, long grassed, prairie, fairy riddled and paths worn with moles and gnomes.

Then, in the morning light, he gave his hand to her, and walked, polite and happy as a flamingo, or a Saurus crane, or a slender grey Egret, or as a tern (as she would have described him), his ankles shaking and shuddering, , the rising dawn flickering like a lemon half spurting, or oil bouncing in a lamp, she swinging his arm with all the force of a round hipped, jasmine cheeked, blue, cheery eyed shepherd girl, with a blue lotus flower in her hair and virulent encouragement in her lips, her hair swinging like the long periwinkle and cloud mushroom studded mountain pines, winnowing in the wind.

As he was pressing a jacaranda, a hyacinth flower to his breast and singing in his scratchy throat.

A mulberry bush for my pocket of posies and thyme

Red banyan seeds for a field found, or a quarry of lyme,

Sixteen sails and sail-ropes to rig the masts with

And the wood of the hulls of my merry vessels are steeped with spray of brine.

Going to sea is what we landlubbers dream of,

While seamen scorn us, but always look out for land,

Charting their courses and steering the proud prow

Like a bullock pulling a plough through the earth and nourishing lambs

With their wives' milk, when the kids have been sold to others farms

Jade green sedges, edges perking up out of the crumbling crust of the soft snow, melting in rivulets and leaning hillocks complicated by tangled whorls of dried and emerald grass, streaked with channels of dark water.

Squirrel Nutkin burrows in a tree with scraps of fabric, twigs, hay and dried leaves, and down feathers of the pigeon, to make a nest to hibernate in. In it, she stores lots of acorns, pine-nuts and chicory nuts, so that whenever she wakes up hungry, she can nibble on them and be nourished and contented.

The dog's ears flap when he dances.

When he barks, his voice wavers.

If we give him something out of kindness,

He will remain our friend always.

The dog sees his reflection in the mirror

When he stands at the edge of the river,

His whole world is reflected

Sky, forest, and his face, all shining with happiness.

"O, man, I pull your vegetable cart.

Please look after me eagerly

If there is a thief, I will bite him with my teeth.

But please let me roam free at times,

I am sovereign and eschew my duty."

The filtered, gauzy streaks of sunlight let in by the designs of air between the leaves of the night jasmine plant, arrayed around the flowers like the blades of a windmill or fan.

Growing brighter, fiercer reddish orange brown on the paving blocks covered by half dried off, half scraped of moss from the monsoon, weathered by the tame and pale, smoke-lined winds of the Bombay winter.

The girl child, she is the protector of her family,

Instead of playing cricket she helps her mother in the kitchen

Her brothers play outside, but she is always involved in the housework

Who says she is not worthy to taste a little of the buttermilk of the household?

The rest of us have, after all.

Green leaves, roots and herbs, bamboo, peepul are her friends

Plucking, cutting, grinding or watering, she makes them into medicines,

In the veil of her mother earth she hangs flower garlands for tender decoration.

She gives the cows graze, milks them and feeds the calves.

She is their friend always and takes them to pastures on foot.

"Take me to the white pearl peaked mountains which flocks clothe with fluffy fleece, and whose snow is pierced with dark brown stems of juniper-trees, growing like grasses grow abundantly, in floating rice fields or sand dunes in which marram tangles, and where their faces are smeared with the evergreen needles growing against the slabs of black rock, like moss and algae grow in the faint and filtered sunlight."

This, the little girl said to her mother, dreaming and dreaming of the walks they would take. She helped her father to set up the fire, gathering dry wood and weeds that were half yellowing, striking a flint against flint to set up a spark that would ignite the kindle-wood.

Squids and sea-anemones growing and swimming in the turquoise blue water, whose waves at the surface look like houses with triangular rooves, corrugated with bubbles of glass.

A mountain valley flowing out into a meadow, and reaching out into a forest wooded and flooded by pines, oaks and maple trees; some deodar, baobab and sal, dotted with rosary-like tulsi, greyish green, and growing heather and dry, bark-like lichen. The cloud mushroom, shrouded the trunks of fallen trees in swathes of white, which the travellers chipped off and put into their evening stews, so hungry were they for vegetables in their diet.

They also grew cucumber and zucchini in the garden, adjoining the forest, which grew jade green, and golden in the sparkening grass and red volcanic clayey soil. Wild coriander and watermelon vines, which they had to prevent the mowers from mowing away.

The mountaintop was like the fallen-out molar of an old man or woman. The sky was purple garnet in the sunrise. Scarcity rent of foraging in the forest was high, for people searching out honey combs, fish, wood and nypah palm leaves. They went to the forest only when they needed to participate in the money economy, like for feeding people at their daughters' wedding, paying labourers to help in their fields, and perhaps to put a teenage son through college.

***

Goose feet and duck foot prints in the marshy soil among the water hyacinth, ivy and water lily, dragonflies, wasps and moths, fire-flies flit among them. The walls of the house are dark, dank and covered with algae and moss.

Nearby, the Sundori tree rises with its brown barked, sinuous, serpentine branches smelling of turpentine, and its boat/banana/fish shaped leaves, shining like bright coins or a gauzy green and gold veil against the sky, swaying and shimmering in the salted, wind-foam sprayed air, the distance a piercing lance's shadow or a window of time, or tunnel of deeds and memories. "At the moment of death, no chance to take a fragment's wealth. The good and bad acts we do, create our joy and sorrow."

The great arch of sky a cathedral dome, containing all the earth, the chequerboard of fields, the panorama of forests. Mountains rise like cold wedges of stone, clothed in evergreen and waterfalls and little village hamlets of hutments.

Drizzling rain creates a rippling, dribbling, ringing sound on your umbrella's top. And you wonder if perhaps it might be time for tea. The workman's wages do not allow for much leeway, but you have saved up so you can travel on a shoestring budget.

***

A beaver's dam, a tortoises' nest, a racoon's burrow, a squirrel's scraps. The beaver dam is made in a trickling silver, slipping, flowing river, a large elm tree fallen, cutting across it and the beaver has brought a plastering of mud to seal the bottom. The tortoise brings twigs and hay to adorn the shape of its eggs' home, wrapped in a wreath. The squirrel burrows into a cave in a standing maple tree trunk, brings hazel nuts, acorns and scraps of wool and tinsel to line its hibernation nest.

A lovely searing, flying flute song, like doves fluttering and roosting in rafters, their grey blue feathers adorning their wings like emblems adorn a maiden's dress, or a stamp adorns a letter, in the letter of invitation God sends to man, to join and participate in His kingdom.

The flute seller stands at the gate.

The forest mother is smeared with moss and ivy vines the colour of pine veridian staining her mouth like betel juice. Her hair is long and tangled like the tangling roots and branches of a forest canopy, wild, unkempt, that house many birds and many nests, who flock above her eyes in fluttering bevys. The soles of her feet are painted with red mud in intricate arabesque flowery patterns.

She smiles at the sky, as it anoints her with rains.

Where, o where, is the edge of the rainbow, and where does the horizon dip and scratch the mountains lonely above the snow peaks of ice-capped, bitterness of cold and the nets made of interlocking branches, of shrubs clinging to its steep face like briars clinging to a rose's stem, or a baby kangaroo clings to its mother's bosom?

***

Sunny side ups, alps, meadows and swans gliding on the lakes. Taking flight in a heart-beat of fluttering, a barrage of wing feathers like a hurricane. Red oleander flowers sway and nod on their bushes, looking at their reflections in the water.

Roses, like pink linen rolled up in a draper's shop, waiting to be chosen by customers who wish to make garments out of them. The patterns of lily petals like paths across sand of footprints of brother Jesus carrying the lonely pilgrim through life.

Marigolds blooming on the margins like lions tossing their manes and snarling with pride. And night jasmine bushes blooming with dark green leaves, like jungles in which the wild cats hide.

Always feel the entirety of what you are doing, thinking, feeling or perceiving when it is in the present and it is good.

'It is he who gives bread to the hungry, and who satisfies them with food."

My sister plants the manioc and arvi and potato seeds in the earth even as she grows corn, wheat and jowar saplings in rows, and rice transplanted saplings in the canal water submerged ditches near the ridges of soil where the drier crops grow.

Their stalks are like pipelines of water, pumping it from the soil into the atmosphere. Their leaves are like filters of carbon dioxide, spinning the carbon into a wealth of grain and stalk and leaf. Wheat is the earth's bronze and the rice its silver, jowar its pearls and corn its gold. Forked, gnarled, knotted and whorling branched ebony trees grow on the margins of the farms, shielding it as wind belts. On the meadow side, the oyster flocked and beige fleeced sheep graze, along with grey, brown and white mottled coated goats, particoloured like the lambs Jacob bred with his skill and ingenuity.

***

Cherry blossom trees, their gnarly black trunks and branches silhouetted against the blue, bright sky. Women rise, in the paper screened, walled shrines, carrying bowls of tea. The igneous pitted rocks around form little mountains on which sprout the roots and leaves of miniature banyan trees. They carry the few grains of rice they have saved from the harvest and scatter them among the marshes, with the purpose that they will become rice fields, bogged, brown, fen-like and steaming with methane.

The fumes and mist rise from the ground in the morning. Beyond them, field, the evergreen forests and snow-capped mountains rise in the distance, the haunt of sages, immortals and martial arts masters.

The peasants: men women and working children draw up their robes to their knees when they work in the ankle-deep mud, bending and crouching to transplant the rice saplings from their nursery to the fields, wearing wide straw hats that look like cooking pots on top of their heads. The women wear pigtails or buns, and so do the men.

"Your greatest weakness can also be your greatest strength," says an old Japanese proverb. The sages say that instead of mourning your pitfalls and shortcomings, take the energies whence they come and sublimate them in a positive direction; do not beat yourself up about your faults; understand their roots and fight with the impulse to do the wrong thing. Channelise the energy into better things; a path to serving society and achieving immortality, salvation, Nirvana or bliss.

Thus say the sages of Oh Yama Nezunomikoto.

***

Ice skating, toe picks, ice hockey, spinning, swaying fluffy scented junipers, branching into a thousand signs, with their needles strung with little droplets of dew like earrings, sap coming

through like hardened amber, honey coloured, which spiders avoid to prevent themselves from getting trapped in it, some sweet maple, sparkling diamonds like icicles hanging from a rafter; piercing the melon rind of the dawn, fiery Aurora's anvil of the blushing rose petals and blood on the carpet of snow.

Snowy peaks like partially bit into apples, fallen teeth, clouds which feed it raining hail and ice crystals in flocks onto the mountain.

Date pits and peach seeds and apricot shells. Bean clippings, all languishing in a corner of the kitchen garbage bag, along with cut cauliflower leaves and stems, a few stray grains of crooked, un-eaten rice and dal.

The lady of the yurt nearby picks blueberries, raspberries and strawberries in small quantities on the bushes and shrubs she passes by and puts them into a leathern or straw bag hung over her shoulder. As she forages with the other women, she chats and leads her young son a long, who is teething. He learns all the words for forest plants and animals which they walk past, as well as the words for sky, ground, air and mountains. He is excited as they are hardly ever still, and runs, squealing and turning in the little gusts of wind in pure delight.

***

They passed a place of extremely tall trees. In it, on the other side of the road, were mangroves, peepul trees spreading their silvery-jade-reddish plum-heart-shaped leaves in strings against the rough tangling trunks, like elephants' hide; and the mangroves were all covered in ivy. The sky stretched on, a bridge, a pool of grey water, an empty water melon rind, infinite, embracing.

Paradise Lost, and then Paradise regained again. Get back to your old self, the one who saw the Mother (Earth) of all things girdled in leaves and flowers, wreathed in garlands of trees and lakes and mountains, with rivers as her toe-rings and clad in emerald dew lined foliage/vegetation.

The enamel blue kameez of the sweeper lady, tied and pierced with porcupine quills, beads and cotton thread embroidery, of red, yellow, green and black.

She is sweeping up the remainder of the dried, fallen leaves from the garden and building compound, and placing them into a dustbin to make a compost mulch out of them.

"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Anyone who has left behind father and mother, sister and brother, or who has sold what he has, will be rewarded by God on the last day and the apostles who did, will sit on the twelve thrones next to Christ, judging the tribes of Israel. Remember, your God is one who recompenses deeds, and every deed is counted, good or bad."

***

The carved window-frame, chiselled with flowers, blossoms, buds, fruits, hummingbirds roosting and feeding from them, branching trees and fluttering geese, was a masterpiece of artistic carpentry and wood sculpture.

But they have sold it, pawned it off to make good on their debts, incurred for hiring labour for planting, tending and harvesting seasons on their wheat and pearl millet growing land, which was now covered in weeds and grasses.

Sheila worked on another family's land now, in addition to her studies. Time management was what kept her going, growing, glowing and achieving. It was Yasinia and Aref who managed the family's plot of land, working on it, and supervising people they had hired just as other people who owned land did. Sheila helped with the cooking in the afternoon and evening.

On her path to the other field, stretched out a view of the lap of the mountains which was covered with slabs of grey green fir trees, thorny, brambly thickets of juniper and blackberry bushes, streams of silvery, foamy, trailing white water rapids, and capped with opal, sparkling snows on the peak like a biting molar.

The houses she passed had patchwork quilts drying on the veranda, or cut grass drying in bales. When the valley of dry bones was prophesied to, there came a rattling sound and the bones were raised up, covered and joined with sinews and tendons and then flesh, and covered with skin, and when the man of God prophesied to them breath, their nostrils were filled with breath and air and wind, and they became alive.

***

A printed darga arch, tiled with painted ceramic;

And inlaid with semi-precious stones cut with a sledgehammer

In curling arabesques of tangled branches, leaves

And flowers, twigs and stamens,

Tulip blossoms, roses, marigolds and thorns,

Arranged in the flowing Persian script

Indecipherable but to an initiate; one gnostic of the sealed nectar

A native of the land or religion.

Arab script shares its letters with Persian

Two languages to describe the sacred experiences of believers in Islam.

Do not speak idly. It is a mortal sin.

And those who do, after the reckoning will be made to

Eat the bitter thorn fruit, which doth not nourish,

Nor release from hunger." In that day, other

Faces will be calm, glad for their effort past,

In a high garden where they hear no idle speech,

Wherein there is a gushing spring, wherein are couches raised,

And goblets set at hand, and cushions ranged,

And silken carpets spread."

The verse enquires as to why the disbelievers do not

Observe the shape, form and textured being of the camel,

Watchful of how they are made?

And the heaven, how it is raised?

And the hills, how they are set up?

And the earth, how it is spread?

Remind them, for thou art but a remembrancer;

Thou art not at all a warden over them.

But whoso is adverse and disbelieveth,

Allah will punish him with direst punishment.

Lo! Unto us is their return; and ours is the reckoning"

--from Al Ghashiya (the Overwhelming – revealed at Mecca).

***

Walnuts and peanuts and almond coloured wood;

Spinning sunlight into sugar and jade leaves into food,

Sparkening heather and bursting hay stacks,

From whorled grasses growing on the prairies' farms,

Gathered in sweet-smelling, moss covered sacks.

The briar rose and musk melon criss-crossing the yard in yarns,

The cows taking shelter from the tempest in barns.

A zebra's criss-crossing hide streaking past,

Hard by you have the solemn chomping of a giraffe.

Hutments of sun-dried mud-bricks packed,

Builders who made them got into the knack,

Of printing them with a signet,

Of a queen's calligraphy ringlet; Mary of the Quran,

A cross kissed by devotees who did not pay the diwan,

The Jizia, or unbelievers' tax, as they were people of the book

And always shivered when they betook

The blessing of the cleansing waters of baptism

The sacrifice of Christ which caused a cataclysm;

He gave his body up to the marauders

And defeated death and its horrors;

Raised the broken temple up again in three days,

The greatest sign of his divinity in many ways

That he would destroy evil and sin

By the grief of his followers took themselves in

To behold his love for them,

They could not ask for more and then,

Must do the same themselves

That take up a cross daily and follow him

Enduring hunger, thirst and toil

Sell all they have and follow the pain and mortification

Of Jesus in their own most cherished husk of skin.

The thickness of blood, of kindness to kith and kin

Must be reciprocated to those who are not related to them,

Th teaching of enemies in the Lords' ways

Must become part of the driving force of their days

Break the cycle of suffering,

Through a Buddhist rendering.

***

A sequinned cotton and silk blouse and ghaghara coloured and interwoven with green, black, red, brown and yellow, done up in a chikan fashion, and bordered by brocade embroidery. Lined with corrugated hulls of seashells, oysters, mussels and scallops. Boks (Siberian cranes) running lie arrows, silver fish, over the rippling waters.

Sheila sat atop the mountain, her hair growing long about her like paths of locusts and termites swarming round her to build their homes over her shoulders, mistaking her for a log. Her hair grew faded and lightened by the harsh sun so that it glowed golden and brown like honey comb, bees' wax or the wings of moths and butterflies, coloured by the play of light from the study lamp or fire flies flitting here and there flying in the passing wind. Her skin grew darker than ever, saffola-oil and canola, coffee or cardamom, molasses and bagasse from sugar cane mills that pressed the sap out of them.

And around her entwined themselves green vines of ivy, watermelon and morning glory, hollyhocks, saplings growing out of the mossy rock seat, that rooted themselves in stone and weathered it to soil, like sand being winnowed to clay.

This birchbark canoe was larger than a raft, but hewn out of an elm tree and covered with peeling bark. In all its cracks, it was patched with pine-pitch. Moss, amber and spider's webs were hewn out and placed as an offering on the altar. Sheila rowed as she sat at the prow, as the boat surged ahead, under the tangled canopy of branches, leaves, flowers and sunlight that filtered down through the atmosphere to kindle the dust, air and dragonflies with a lamp-meche of sunlight, of filigree gold and a sliver of silver wires from the half risen sickles of the moon and the morning star in the coconut milk-blue morning sky.

The bird flew above across the forest like flying buttresses of a cathedral, or the arches and prayer niches of a mosque or darga, soaring, slipping through the air, torpedoing like seals through the arctic water, shattering ice sheets, squealing and seeing and chirping and calling and chattering like chipmunks or woodpeckers hacking at wood in a staccato of tapping the trunk of the tree to hew out its nest.

The robin's eggs were the colour of the enamel-blue painted bunting sky, pooled in a swirl of twigs, grass, dried leaves and feathers; like marzipan easter eggs, but they soon awakened within and hatched, and the little straggly baby bird emerged from its nutritive casing of yolk, opened its papery brown eyelids and looked with pure, innocent, brown watery eyes upon the world for the

first time. Its parents' joy knew no bounds. They fed the chick babies worms, chick pea seeds, sunflower seeds, and insects like sow bugs, and caterpillars they found nibbling the leaves of the tree on which the nest nested.

***

The fellaheen, or Arabic for yeoman, rose from the forests and took back their lands, their kerchiefs hanging low over their foreheads, leaning on their staves as they climbed up the crumbling, footloose hills.

They took back their land from the thieving fighters, the landlords and the government; wrested their rightful property from unworthy hands.

And they walked across the length and breadth, dividing it into cubits, furrowing and tilling it, and then sprinkling seed into its crumbling soil. Then they watered it with the slanting poled buckets of water slung across their shoulders, and tended the saplings. Those who enact work on the land, rather than those who see its produce, are the rightful owners of it.

And they will say: be thou glorified! It was not for us to choose any protecting friends beside thee, but thou dids't give them and their fathers ease till they forgot the warning and became lost folk.

Her hair was the colour of brown eagle feathers, streaked with grey and white, speckled like a pheasant. She rose, her hands wringing against one another, saying, "They took my children away, and there are being made to work in the uranium mines. We must find them; please help me to trace them and remove them from there, just to bring them back home.

She wiped tears from beneath her eyelids and her shoulders shook. Obey the Lord," she said. "When he tells you to leave your parents and help others, obey him. Or something bad may come of it."

***

Balkhi Kohinoor diamonds glittering atop Shah-Jahan's throne, topped with a peacock train mounted on a silver backrest. The ceiling of the darga rises high above it, towering, arching inlaid with marble carved niches and sandalwood screens, like a roof of the concave sky, in which winds blow and sweep.

Turquoise sea waves topped with silver and pearl foam, like manes of horses flying atop racing coursing stallions, flying in the whipping breeze.

Fluttering, laughing filigree of Gulmohar leaves, stirring, nodding, bouncing and leaping in the caressing wind.

Dragonflies, with iridescent wings and helicopter like bodies climbing up the ladder of air.

A granite grey, slate, fly ash brick coloured temple, with doors inlaid with lapis lazuli on the edge of a polluted river. The wages of a shepherd to see as she comes to the next township. Her cheek is like the sprinkling of bread for sparrows with the dawn light. Their beaks peck furiously at the ground, unearthing rice grains, crumbs scattered of the wheat bread, swallowing the bread like hungry chicklings, swallowing what their parents give them, dropping it down their throats. Her hair is the wind-whipped marram flattened by the tide, blowing like mermaid's hair under the surface.

***

The grey and white marbled cat like a jug of jal-jeera-ed milk or a scoop of ice cream, or a cumulus cloud, mewing loudly for rice.

Pigeons, gathering to follow the rice scattered to them, at the confluence of village and forest,

Peahens, warming their twig and dry leaf nests, lined with down feathers and ferns, bamboo stalks and leaves cut from the nearby woods to feed lowing cows and maa-ing goats.

Filigreed, blood-vessels, letting of heat, on the forehead of his wife and work partner,

Tied by a blue veil to keep away dust and germs. She emerges from the dark shed to winnow the wheat, and separate it from its husks; then she will lead the cattle and other livestock on a field trip for grazing.

The goats of her household mill around her legs, hoping to be led soon to pasture; maa-ing and railing, hoping for a little pat on the head, or, in the case of those that were not hers, a nudge on the side to make them not get in her way, but she is kind to animals.

The winds of immortality are upon them, the holy winds that bring the white glow to their limbs, faces and necks, if they are of a fair skin and if they are of a dark, the lambent shine, blow, sending up dust in screens of sand, lashing against their faces

And they bring their scarves to cover their faces, necks, hair, forehead and even eyes, to avoid its chafing and stinging against their skin.

The eyes can see far and wide

Stars, planets, moons, in a halo around her forehead; and as she sorts the garbage in the bins, wet from dry, organic from inorganic, she does her task lovingly, diligently as her eschewment of duty.

Turquoise, sea green, kelly and chrysoprase were the colours of leaves and stems all around them: stems like veins in the forearms of young people who carried water for a living.

Baobab stems, wide, bulging grey brown-beige trunks, into which children climbed and played house.

Doors made of driftwood, carpenters never chopping down living trees.

Mangroves of epiphytic vines and nets of orchids growing atop their sinuous roots, the canopy of leaves like meche; leaves cut from jade and fitted above the winding stems like shimmering clouds of vegetation, singing in the salty seawater spray and the chirruping of crickets.

Storks and ducks sunning themselves as they swim on the shallow grey green water.

Clucking and squawking with their yellow nostril-ed beaks, flapping their brown black oil coated feathers thus treated by their oil-glands so that their feathers would never be wet and their would not drown.

One down feather of a stork, floating atop the dallying waves of the river like the impress of a finger print signature on a vital document, a proof of residence or a certificate of matriculation.

***

We sustain the universe though our re-enactment of giving sustenance, nourishment, succour. And our flesh is brown, supple, energised by many points of light and nerves and sinew. Cheeks like red apples stewed and boiled with clove and cinnamon, lemon fizzing it up.

I saw skull-capped, razor thin men pushing carts of cargo through a traffic laden road from go-down to market place. School children scurrying down steps of a bus. Grey, bare buildings with windows leaning into the light, covered with advertisements and billboards of colourful print, hawking gadgets and toys and specially prepared food before Eid-ul-fitr. What a happy, busy suburb this was, I wanted to explore it further. Sit down and write.

A peacock feather crown, dotted with golden spots and navy blue and pine streaks and curlicues, fluttering atop his (Krishna's) head. I am all that you think, all that you know, all that you do, all that you say; everything hangs on me, like pearls in a thread. I am the earth's scent, and the fire's heat. I am appearance and disappearance. I am the trickster's hoax.

If only you knew, how much you are loved.

Duck-dirt is present on your hands and legs in a dusty, feathery layer from when the birds beat their wings and cast their net of dirt upon your body; already brown, it becomes grey.

The dried grass, once green, is woven into a basket for carrying papers, letters, books, stamps and even sheaves of manuscripts.

Ask the gardener not to pluck plants from the wall, and let them grow in its cracks.

Jesus, our Lord, said, "Even the Eunuchs are children of God. Make his paths straight.

***

Flowing rivers, quake and quiver, in oxbow arches, lined with pebbles, rocks and boulders

As the aspens shake and shiver, their leaves whispering prayers to the wind,

Meandering down paths of silver

The hoary heads of the mountains, bowed with clouds, yet have the succour of rain; their stewardess, the river-sprite, a serpent woman, whose head is a waterfall anointed with birds perching, chirruping and nest building, tasselled with woven braids of the rivers' channels, deep, icy covered and meandering.

Her palms are rosy, vermilioned, crimson colour and she wears a moss-coloured green dress whose colour crosses with the enamel of the sky.

Her skin is the bark of the deodar, a slate-grey mixed with the brick reddish of volcanic ferrous clay, pitted and wrinkled with many furrows, and crinkles and laugh lines, each of which crinkle has a story and purpose and raison d'etre.

She is a seamstress and sows together different parts of the ecosystem with horsehair, patched with cow manure and twine, taking ivy leaves and maple leaves to be sown together with the roots of grasses, undergirding and interpenetrating the flighty, loose, fleeting soil.

On the mountain dwells and breathes a small village of farmers, their mud bricked walls lined with drying cakes of cow-dung, which they use as fuel. In the center of each hut is a hearth, with an orange, flower like fire burning to cook their broths, flat bread and vegetables for sustenance.

Trees bursting into bloom with powder blue and purple flowers, shade the huts from the baking rays of the sun during summer, and the soft, gelid, freezing fingers of the snow, which falls like manna bread, during winter. And the people cultivate the mountain like slopes with scythes, sickles and shovels, growing wheat and nachini, jowar and toor dal.

[iiii]Chapter 7. Setting Up Classroom

Shiela stood at the shop with Yasinia, who was purchasing lumps of coal, seeds and paper for paper for binding notebooks, and watched as the cook from the chaikhana scattered food for the dogs and

birds that had gathered around the doorway. He tossed bits of naan into the air in a parabolic trajectory and the dog made a yipping yelping motion, and caught it in between his jaws. The next one lobbed, the other dog leapt up and swallowed the bullet. Crows had crowded round the dogs, cawing and leaping, scuttling and scavenging, a veritable court, a zoo of creatures for the cook.

"My job is to share," he said drolly. "I prepare food that others may be nourished, but I have a not only to those who can pay, but to those who merely need and cannot offer coins in return. These creatures live by humour, going where it is enjoyable to them, eating only when they prefer, and never out of habit or greed, never doing anything other than is conducive to life, and God has sent me as one who may nourish them, that it may be part of my livelihood, squandering the left over morsels for these impoverished creatures. Not that it feeds my belly, but that it feeds my soul. For birds and dogs neither toil or spin, but search in rafters and rubbish heaps for food, and among scraps of offal, scrounging for succour."

"And dogs, which are the children of wolves, are indeed the friends of man, helping us in sledding and in herding sheep, whose milk and without which we could not live and whose fleece in shawls shields us from the skinning winds."

Sheila looked onwards and saw, children were playing on the hillside, and spied a young woman wearing a red scarf, wheeling her niece up and down as if she was turning a windlass at a well, laughing as if the sun kissed her face, and the infant screaming in delight.

They played awhile against the blue sky, and Sheila stood sturdily in the welkin. Yasinia was making her purchase and made notes in her sketchpad for practice. The woman called out to her, still laughing, salaaming, said, "Khala, you a teacher?"

"Indeed, I am one."

"I am looking for a one. I need to put this child in some school or the other, or she will grow up to be ignorant like me."

"You can't be ignorant. But indeed, school may teach her to pay attention to tasks and teach her to be literate, and to listen to her elders."

"Dear, dear, she needs to go to school, then." She said the woman to the child didactically. Her niece nodded in reply. "Indeed, I wish to become learned," said the niece.

"Can you get her ready at eight thirty at morning tide and send her to the school at the bottom of the hill? Do you work somewhere outside?"

"Indeed, I work in a store in the town and must leave by nine in the morning to reach on time and begin my work. School will be a good place for her then."

"Do send her every day and you'll be surprised to see what a change it makes in a child to be around others her own age and to be taking in new information daily."

"I thank you for pointing this out to me," said the young woman. "I shall send her; we at home all have a mind to it."

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Sheila negotiated this spot every day, the crossroads where the anti-school lobbyists, the turban wearing, moustachioed, rifle wielding, male chauvinists dwelt and had their main office in the village. Grey washed houses, cracking walls, better built by far than her own childhood hut in Nuristan, where she had once learned to fight and to keep house and to study. Telephone cables reaching far above the houses, definitely not a luxury she had grown up with, forked poles piercing the sky like oars stirring a lake.

"If you only knew," said Sheila, "How poor I was when I was young, a bonded worker, you would not grudge me for teaching my children to live an easier life, one of learning and curiosity. You would not grudge me for teaching them trigonometry and how to etch the stars and the domes upon

paper. You would not grudge me for teaching them how buildings like yours are built, so that when barn construction time comes, they can build them with more sturdiness than if they were merely left to their own devices, when chance storms would come and flatten the structure as if it were a pile of matchsticks.

"We are not complaining about those things," said one of the men who had come out to barricade her. "We merely demand that you do your duty, which is to stay and work at home."

"Me and my sister, we are both breadwinners, and my brother, who lives with us, is a farmer. I obtained this education at my sister's expense, who sent me to college in Kabul on her former wages, so that I could learn a profession. And I will make good on it, teach the children what they need to learn."

Sheila was surprised that for once, they were even willing to have dialogue with her.

"What does your sister do, then? Is she a teacher?"

"No, she is a medicine woman. She heals people of their illnesses through Allah's power and casting out of the djinns. If you stop me, she and I can make the rain stop showering over your fields, my but having met your eyes in conversation is enough."

The man looked scared. "I shall not stop you from going to work, sister," he said. "I but want to learn one thing from you. Who taught you such fearlessness? It is not seen among our women, or any women that we have yet encountered."

"That is but because God did not give them the opportunity to exhibit such fearlessness in front of you. I can tell you, they surely have the power, but have chosen not to use it, as they feel sorry for you. I trust in God, and therefore have no fear of earthly men. Indeed, if you truly have the fear of Him, you will let other women return to their work, and continue acting in proximity to the will of God."

The man was silent for a minute. "Who helps your brother farm?" he asked.

"Indeed, he hires labourers," said Sheila. "Now let me pass, brother. The children wait."

***

"Volcanoes," said Sheila, "Are the most fascinating, but hazardous explosive landscapes.

There are three types: shield, mound and caldera. We live on a mountain now, that rumbles every now and then, which means that possibly it is a volcano and could erupt when we least think it should. A similar, though far more pressing hazard is the shells and bombs and bullets that many in our country face today.

"A volcano is formed when the molten rock, lava or magma from the mantle of the earth erupts from the crust of the earth, and flows upon its surface, creating a sloping platform which peaks in the middle. When the lava that erupts is thin, runny, the slope is gentle, making a shape like a shield; but when it is viscous, the mountain it makes is higher, more like a tall hill, and is called a mound volcano. Sometimes, the force of the explosion is so great that it blows the top off a volcano, creating a crater, a depression in the land, that one can walk into, and is called a caldera, related to the word cauldron, or pot of a hot liquid.

There have been several instances when a volcano has erupted, and remember children, that if you ever find that is happening, that you leave all your belongings and run, flee as nothing can avail you then, no possessions, no nothing.

They knew. They had the experience from shelling.

In the Terai region of Nepal/ Bihar, the land is low lying and flat, and floods easily and is very fertile for growing rice, wheat and barley, though the people that work the land are not always the ones that own it. The Oxen that we bred for centuries are enured to great heights and biting cold, and their hump behind indicates that they have the marks of interbreeding with Brahmin Bulls that

were characteristic of the civilizations of Mohenjo Daro and Haprappa in North India and Pakistan. The people who ran these civilizations were then enslaved by the Aryans when they conquered from the North and laid waste to their cities. They were then employed in menial jobs by the new rulers, and as the centuries went by, they forbade intermarrying among what had now become the ethnically determined occupations or castes. It is now a great shame to that nation, that some can read and write and some cannot, because the Brahmins forbade any farmer caste person from learning to read or write, making sure that there would always be a mass of people whose only option was to till the land, and which couldn't make a living through doing business, governing the land or saying prayers. So make sure you learn well, to do Afghanistan proud. But don't be fooled. It's not that Afghnaistan doesn't have a caste system either; just think of how the Pashtun are hierarchically at the top, while the Hazaras are discriminated against and kept poor in their lands. That is not to mention the matriarchal Brahui people, who must resist Persianization, and much discrimination and patriarchal imposition by the other groups, in order to maintain their identity.

The mountains of the Pamir Knot, the Karakoram, the Himachal, the Himadris and the Himalayas, as well as the Tibetan plateau, were formed when the South Asian Peninsular plate separated from Gondwanaland or the East Asian plate by the Tethys sea, slammed into Gondwana land and pushed the rocks in the collision up into the sky, creating land at a higher level."

They have always said that Afghanistan is a blessed place, clean, proud, albeit dusty. But if we're going to try to prove that, we'll fail, because all places on earth are hallowed by the Lord's intentions, woven by his purposes, informed by his knowledge and skill, each and every stone, every tree, invested with his light and energy, cognizance and remembrance. But at the same, time, at this moment, though things may seem beautiful, it needs our work, because what appears to be is not always what is.

We are now gravely concerned over the condition of the political situation which is targeting Muslims in India, but will not stop at that, and will ultimately target Christians, Buddhists, Animists, Jains and Parsis, as well. The regime is enacting upon them all sorts of crimes and inconveniences such as forced eviction, forced disappearances, and detention. Among them, the Kashmir issue cannot be relegated to being a merely a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan, as countless human rights violations carried out systematically by the Indian army prove that it is only with international intervention that India's dealings in the region may be kept clean. And to mention another major set of human rights violations, just this year, countless evictions of Bengali Muslims from Assam have been carried out by the BJP government, with the result that they have been left homeless and without a livelihood, and worst of all, the ones without citizenship are separated from their families and sent to concentration camps in which no one but they and the guards know what happens. The Strong arm of the BJP, called the RSS which is its executive in many non-democratically sanctioned affairs, has been building camps to contain the recently created refuges, and given that the government has announced no plans underway to relocate and resettle them, one can only imagine what the plans of the current government are to do with the refugees in the currently camps whose construction was underway just a few months ago, and within which people are disappearing. Hitler carried out his anti-Jewish pogrom for four years unkown to the rest of the world, while the allied powers were simply struggling to enter Germany and stop its invasion of other countries, the RSS and BJP keep and sell Hitler's auto-biography "Mein Kampf" in their bookstores, as a Bible on the so-called 'Aryan' superiority-complex and how others must be rooted out, the signs are pointing to a necessity for international intervention in the current day scenario in India, which is sanctioning () a Hindutva BJP lead attack on all forms of religious and cultural diversity. Later in the letter I have given examples of people whose lives were ended through the National Resident's Commission.

The international community must act, and act soon to put due pressure on India, and infiltrate Indian border regions with UN troops, who must be armed sufficiently to combat the Indian Army, and protect the poor, the uneducated, the religious minorities from all oppression, suppression and political hazard.

India is a country of glaring inequalities, of intolerance and power struggle in the midst of diversity, despite pledges to safeguard this very diversity from the time of independence from colonial power.

The powerful through their corruption, inefficiency and divisive micromanagement, have crushed the survival prospects of millions belonging to the poor and the lower classes, denying them basic services in reasonable quality such as education, housing, electricity, water and sanitation, and in the past, have prevented a majority of the non- Brahmin population, from even becoming literate. Over the centuries, there have been mass conversions of lower castes to Islam and Christianity, which in creed preached universal brotherhood, a social security institution, equality and integration between all classes. The current suppression of Indian Muslims actually stems from a Hindu intolerance of the unwillingness of Muslims to participate in a system which systematically others and exploits some human beings, while affording untold privileges and powers to others, based on race, caste or birth.

No, India is not only for the upper caste Hindus. It is for everyone, and that everyone includes Dalit Buddhists, and Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians, Muslims and OBC Muslims, mainstream Muslims and Christians, Parsis, Buddhists, Hindus and Jains. India claims to be a secular country. But what has been happening recently proves otherwise.

What is happening under the NRC in Assam is unacceptable. They cannot evict people who have been living in Assam since childhood or who have no other livelihood option, or even have been living there for 2-3 generations, just because they happen to be Muslims, or because they are supposedly inconvenient for the BJP government.

The article in the Indian Express, September 29th "Bengal NRC Deaths, Kin say had lost hope on papers" about Hussainur, a child, who is afraid his mother will go just like his father, who died of a heart attack in the stress of anticipating a displacement?

The panic ensuing after rumours of a national register of Citizens (NRC) exercise in West Bengal has already claimed 11 deaths. Khairun, Nahar Bibi's husband, thinking the family would be driven out, because the NRC was coming and would have nowhere to go, and have to start their full livelihood from scratch. On September 22nd, another person, Mondol, Khairun's husband, was found hanging from a mango tree, leaving behind a grieving wife Khairun, and two sons. Khairun states horrifically that every time she even touches a document, her younger son shouts, saying that if she touches the papers, she will die too.

These are merely 2 examples, but if one delves into the newspaper reports, one will find many others.

The fact that normal, hardworking citizens are facing threats to their lives and threats of evictions for no real crime, by the Assamese and Bengali State Governments calls into question whether these governments are actually fit to rule, because governments are supposed to make the place they are in charge of safe and conducive to life, livelihood and happiness for their dwellers.

The Bengali Muslim refugees who have escaped from stagnant economic situations in Bangladesh should be given the opportunity to thrive in Assam and West Bengal, their chosen place of livelihood, not die between the wheels of an uncaring and even divisive government bureaucracy.

The Central and State Government lead NRC's are plunging thousands of Bengali Muslim residents of Assam into mental illness, fatal physical illnesses and suicides, as they know what is coming at the end of it: concentration camps. Please end the NRC commission. It is too costly in terms of human lives and sanity, and is ending moreover the credibility of the government's ability to enable a conducive environment for the health, growth, life and liberty of its citizens.

Students of various places are protesting to end the NRC immediately through mass pressure on Indian Government to cease and inquiry into local affairs.

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I would have said yesterday, that, be it a mountain in Tibet, with evergreens clinging to its rugged face, shrines rappelling up its fissures, or a palm tree in Karnataka which men climb like lightning, dropping coconuts into the marking sand, or a lake in Burma across which skull-capped fishermen's boats glide. Every place is infiltrated with human intelligence, and the non-human will, even if it

the most wretched shantytown in Asia or Africa or South America, without electricity, water or sewage systems. This also means we have a duty to change things, infest its lack of cleanliness by our own methods, evolving, growing, changing for the better. And this takes dedication, study and cooperation, steadfastness of mind and creativity of the faculties. We can learn how to build stables, shelters, waste disposal units, even power plants, from within the small confines of this classroom. And we can learn to share what we have, distribute it among all the people of the world. But today I say, that no works can be done without our first rooting out hatred from our hearts, and before casting a spell on our minds to remove bigotry.

The form of the arches of a mosque or of a gothic church depend upon the angles which one draws from the window sill up into the sky to roof it. For example, in order to construct a pinto acuto, or a basic gothic arch on paper, first draw a horizontal line and divide into six parts, and from each second part from the centre, draw a circle with your compass pencil until the two trajectories of your circles meet at the top and continue your line in an 180 degree angle on both sides at the southern half of your quadrant.

In order to construct an Islamic arch, first draw an equilateral triangle, meaning each of its angles is a sixty degree angle, and then, putting your compass point on each of the lower apexes of the triangle, draw two circles with the pencil that pass through the topmost apex of the equilateral triangle. Where the two circles meet, which is the topmost angle or apex of the equilateral triangle, is the tip of the arch you have constructed.

A few other thoughts before we end. India has the problem of the tradition of manual scavenging. Some people think the solution lies in modern sewage treatment plants. But some scientists say, that, rather than treating the sewage, it should be transported through ducts and used on crop fields in its raw form, because using treated sewage on fields leads to crops grown with various deficiencies in copper, magnesium, calcium and iron, which causes dangerous deficiencies and disorders in humans who consume the crops in their food. At the same time, letting the untreated sewage seep into the sea, also leads to eutrophication and algal blooms in the ocean ecosystem, where oxygen consuming green plants and algae are given a boost by the increased nitrogen content from the sewage, and starve the existing fish and other ocean organisms of oxygen, leading to habitat fragmentation and species extinction.

So we must take care to have the full facts before us, before we decide to do anything a particular way, just because that method happens to be dictated, propounded, defended or in any way proposed by the dominant development discourse, which is supported by a nexus of scientists having connections in industry which provide infrastructure and for their markets to remain open and unquestioned.

At the same time, the question would be, how to get the human excreta onto the fields without people having to manually collect it and scatter it over the field? Perhaps, instead of having toilets, the people should go to answer nature's call in the field and not bother about constructing a shelter about it and being embarrassed.

***

"Friendship is the most important thing ever – help your friends up when they fall down, give them sensible advice when they do wrong, or when they need assistance with studies, assist them, so that you can all learn together.

"I learn much from my friends," said Mahmood, "I learn as much from them, as from reading books."

"Yes, but you know how Allah commanded Mohammed to read, and the rest of us to read what was revealed to him."

"That is true."

"Indeed, you have a point. There is much which can be learned from observation."

"Look out the window, folks, said Sheila suddenly. Mahmood and the children craned their necks out of the slats and saw a flock of white, brown and grey storks alighting on the fields and terraces, as if they were rocks at sea, gulls and egrets were roosting and playing in them.

"Oh, do let's go feed them!" begged Samaira. "I will feed them my tiffin for today, as I'm not hungry."

"No you won't," said Sheila. "But there may be something to going outside and watching those creatures, seeing what they can teach us.

The class cheered, and as they filed out, Sheila leafed through her meagre collection of books to find a passage on storks in the short encyclopaedia she possessed.

"Storks migrate south when the weather gets too cold in Siberia for them to roost and scatter themselves along the fields and hills of central Asia, namely the countries of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. There is a saying: when the stork comes, a hailstorm is not far."

"Come children! We must buy tarpaulin, and lots of it!" said Sheila, but then she remembered. "Oh, children!" running to catch up with them.

"O hailstorm, crystals of a princess' necklace,

We desire not your baubles, nor your raillery--

Go back and rain on the Baltic Sea, so remote for me.

O hailstorm, teeth of a magpie,

Fangs of a shark, heralded by the sharp beaked stork

I bite your belly of cloud, and spit it on the ground below.

Begone, tempest, begone!

I see the sun's strong glow; it bolsters the shape of the tree."

They chanted the rhyme as they marched along the pathways between the fields, from house to house, warming the inhabitants and farmers, many of them their parents, of the impending storm.

"Yes," said one of the farmers. "I have been smelling it in the air, and thought it might be falling. So, I'll cover my crop with all of the clothes that I own."

***

"Herders and farmers of the poorer classes really have it hard, many of them eat only once a day and follow their herds that roam, wander, play and graze. The faithful herders follow the flocks wherever they would go, whether to the peak of the mountain snows or to the valley of the lake and the grottos of the glen, the very lowest pastures clogged with tangling brush and woody vines and thorny shrubs and bushes. They breathe the fragrance of clover, and the perfume of the buttercups and tiny violet flowers, growing virulently among the grasses that the cattle and other livestock, goats, chew on. The farmers are only slightly better off, and spend their free time planning what they will, millet and corn and wheat and rice, brinjal, peas tomato and potato, beans and cauliflower, for home and for markets."

What she did not say: "Their bodies are hardy and their hearts beat to the swinging of their gait, slender like sal trees and browned like jute ropes dried in the sun, like khir seasoned with tamarind cracking on top, filled with almonds and raisins, crunchy and hard and full of sweetness."

And she did not say: "It is a hard life, crouching at the chullah, the glow of the fire singeing your cheeks, the smoke making you cough, the crackling fire roasting your wheat bread which scorches your fingers at the edges when you flip them over with deftness," because they already knew.

She thought, a hard life eating only once, not twice, not thrice, but once, assimilating all your food throughout the day after you digest it. It affects the way you walk, talk, work, think. You strike your

rod on the ground, to let your flock know you are changing direction, but not too forcefully, to avoid being like Moses when he struck the rock, rather than tapped it, as he was ordered to do by God, that water would spill from its face and his people would be able to drink. Because she knew.

***

Loud calls and truckling laughter characterize the settlements of Oman, reed boats and arched, curling rooves of houses, plying the green, serpentine river, children watching the reflections of their fires in the slipping water.

Women strike the oars into the bottom of the river, paring up sludge, surging their boats forwards like sturgeons, their veils flying like vulture's wings, or like leaves from branches in autumn, or like clouds or sail's arching calligraphy in the soaring sky.

And at the same time, a little girl in Iran cries: "Wait! Hassan! It is not noon yet! We can still play together!"

And Hassan cries, "I have seen to it that it will never be noon! It is the spring equinox so the shadow will never completely disappear from under the stick. And we do not live on the equator. Do not worry anymore."

For the story went that the girl Sara would be disallowed form playing with her friend Hassan after it turned noon, because that was when she turned twelve, and according to tradition would then be a woman.

The broken Hassan had tried tampering with the heavenly spheres until he realized that the geography lesson was entirely in his favour, as in the Iranian islands on which they lived, so close to the Somalian mainland, which was whence their curly hair came from like the curling coats of the goats of Gilead, the sun never made it to its zenith of the sky even at noon, so it was never a true noon so to speak, or at least no one could prove it was beyond doubt and that was enough for him.

But who, other than she, would listen to his logic? Hassan cried and wept, and his mother comforted him, it's not like she's moved away from the village! You'll still see her when she goes to fetch water from the well in the morning when you go out in the fields to help."

He replied that he only wanted to play with his friend. "Now they will act as if she is estranged from me and is not my friend anymore." His mother replied that it would be better if they adopted her, then she would truly be your sister like she said she was.

The kind of trauma traditional structures impose on children is untrivial. Who knows how and when he will be healed from their riven ribs?

***

Avan writes:

Friends we are, and then we think

But little of our skins,

But watch our woollen skeins

That we weave so nimbly, so thimbly,

How they come unravelled when we weave

Except to marvel how we come

To one another's aide in need.

Chasing adventure after clouds have chased

The sun to sleep under the billowy covers of the waves,

And acquaint our-selves with the night

When owls peep and cats prowl

And canaries sleep and coyotes howl.

Not marvelling, but training tis

For each and every of our soldiery's deeds

Is folded, wrapped in conspiracy

To unravel tyranny, dipping as we dip in the cauldron of peace.

Proud and immoveable our enemies,

Not looking to their creator's might

But scorning others, supposing themselves,

Unimpeachable and right. They will learn, when they see the mellow autumn burn, as it lamps in our land, or the veined geode eroding in the ravages of the truckling stream.

We walk along the path to enlightenment

And we absorb our enemies into our ranks

Through the path of knowledge and peace

And thus to unbrick hierarchy

And thus to restore sweet equality.

Serene as a statue, a tree with many living leaves swaying in the gusts, and casting her fragrance upon it, as a fisherman nets in the sea.

Sheila writes:

He who with a steadfast mind

Wishes well to those who scorn him,

Escaping their path of orbit and setting up his own,

Or turning their orbit into his,

Speaking to them lovingly and teaches them of his own joy

Attains bliss.

I know my friends the mountain dwellers

Humble, Graceful, frugal.

Depending on dreams from heaven.

In charge of their souls, their souls in charge of them,

Steering the wind which licks the foam

Above the seas, the spray in strings
Like string models
Above the water slowly falling
A painting: Lizards and raindrops
Drizzling and scaled
Scurrying, flurrying, misting up the view.
Darting like lightning,
the Chameleon, hiding and streaking
Across the dark bark of the tree.
Dreams are visions
and visions speech. Speech conjures visions just
As visions conjure words.

Having forsaken luxury
The ministries of the angels are now open to her.
The sweet caress of flower petals
Adorn her peaceful speech.

Her teeth like pearls,
Her forehead empty, like
A carven pumpkin
Full of clear morning dew and mist ridden hillsides
Her braids like the tassels of a pony,
Like the spread eagle feathers
Of an outstretched wing.
Sounds of wind and bellowing thunder
Rain cascading over a cliff
The scurrying blows of cloud
The brushes of whiffs,
her voice staid, calm, breathy
Like a flute, like a condor calling triumphantly.

"O found," said Sheila. "Thou art found!"
"O searched for," said Avan. "Thou art here."

"Dost thou remember those two imps, Turin and Gibrail? They're in the tenth class now."

"Indeed I do remember them. How could I forget? Are our families intact here? Is everyone alright?

"Some more alright than others. Why, so many days we shared, taking our livestock up that mountain pass … and many the things that we saw from those rocks and caverns."

"What are you doing these days?"

"Yes, I'm teaching in a school, geography and language. It's a challenge, but worth it."

"Indeed, our tribes remember your youthful diplomacy, and try to wend it into negotiations now for Kurdistan's making, though we are far freedom yet, I can tell you that."

***

I am a spool of straw, a stick,

A bale of hay, a starling

Leaping from the cow dung pit

Up to the rafter, barring

Forests of dense canopy thick

Outgrowing milder feathers,

Striped with grey and coaly soot

And streaked with mint and heather.

This beautiful forest, dense gnarly wood

With rough trunks sinewy sprawling

The leaves a tender jade leafed cut

As though from velvet sawing

The upside shining, coins of light

And peppery smooth and cowling

Air which slips through a fairy tern's flight

The underside, rough brawling

And below me as I root for fish

In the bickering stream fast running

Diamonds of the broken sun

Below which grow the mosses on

Rocks of slippery cunning

The river, wide, the field astride, the mountains

Purpling distance

Sway and ride, like hammock's pride

Upon the moon-bright morning

And I ask the fish I catch not to eat

But how they swim in water

For many a times I've wondered that

An avian's hang-gliding daughter.

A memory: When Yasinia caught Sheila trying to sew a rudimentary cap, she said: "Keep at it, keep at it my girl. Even if it does not earn thee much. Dost remember the story of the man and the immovable stone? God had commanded a man in the village to keep pushing at a stone in order to move it, a tall rock in a cave in the outskirts, by pushing on it with his hands and arms. He did so, but the rock never moved.

He asked the Lord, "O One of Inscrutable Ways, whence have you commanded me to move this stone? For it cannot be moved by human might or cunning, it is immoveable. "God said, "Stand up and look at yourself! You have become strong! Your arms are muscled and your back thickly sinewed."

"This story illustrates how, when we work, we should work for the joy of it, watching how it develops us, rather than always looking for gains from the work. For any work is worthwhile as long as it does not cheat others, be it useful, producing food or raiment, or productive of beauty and pondering, such as art, or even the work that affords or gives us knowledge."

My name is Yasinia, and I am a dressmaker. I weave, embroider and sew. Ask my sister Sheila, in my resourcefulness and thrift I have worn out many clothes, till they were cracked and frayed in every corner. I have mended them till they were patched in every other place, full of holes covered and fringed. I have clothes still that I wore as a fifteen year old, used as rags now to sweep and mop the floor, stinking and rank.

This, Najam, my friend is a stonemason, and chisels stones into a flat, polished brightness, and then carves them into slabs for prayer cubicles, sometimes making lattice screens. The shapes he carves are like leaves of mango trees, budding and bursting, flowers and green, encapsulated fruit, seeds and acorns falling to the ground to be nibbled upon by squirrels and chipmunks.

My friend is often away on commissions, and I hardly ever know when he will be back, so I make my own time, my own days full of artistry and passion, imagining and executing the most beautiful designs because that is my calling, what the Lord bids me to do."

"My name is Najam, and I am a stonemason. Indeed, it was my great grandfather that carved the door at Yasinia's house, though it is made not of stone, but of good elder wood, which is why it is so dark in colour. When I visited her first, I recognised his handiwork at once, and told her, of course, though at first, she did not believe me.

Indeed, I use blades, chisels and planes. I strike at the stone as though with a flint, and it breaks open like an apple, flat on both sides. When I compare my handiwork to fruits, I must be careful, because my beloved's forehead is like a pomegranate, beautiful and complicated. Then, I discover the lines and veins in marble or other stone, and make drilled tracings to represent designs, like the branches of a tree, or the arteries of an almond.

Yasinia is the girl I love, but I hardly get to see her, and that is how the Lord would have it, I suppose, until we were married. But it's no telling how much she inspires me, and she knows it, too, or I think so, because I've told her more than once, I think. She just wishes there was more time to spend together, she's told me herself. Till then, every stone pared, every rock halved, every shawl sewn, is what we live by, and what we feel and know." And this, too is Knowledge.

"In the making of our livelihoods all of you Afghans are proud men, even when we are mere paupers, we never admit it to ourselves," I once said.

"If you fetched water to soften the stone and eroded it like streams would a pebble, people might not respect you as much, but the truth, thankfully, is not that distorted," Yasinia replied.

Sometimes, in my carving, I find the arms of Yasinia, the curling mound of her strong biceps, the locks of her bright hair cascading down her back, the arch of her smile or of her foot, the fulness of her lips or the prayer niche of her eyebrows, but never could I carve thus a picture, for the depiction of animate beings is disallowed in our religion. Moreover, the depiction of a damsel is frowned upon. And I could never bring myself to depict a woman on stone, where she could never be erased, even if she wanted to, for erasure is the goal of every Muslim -- release from the bonds of self, into the freedom of the ocean of work and experience -- the soul of Pir, of saint, or master of himself, an ascetic.

Yasinia laughs at me, saying, "Oh, you men, will see a woman in everything! And then to deny it!"

And she is correct, but not so correct, for no being, who changes in reality would, in truth, prefer to have their form engraved upon stone. We are all changing, like water.

She says she prefers cooking for more people, rather than few, and I like to take that to mean she'd like to set up house with me some day, or that I could marry into her messy family, for that is what it is, I can tell you that with a smile that means I couldn't care less if it were messy or otherwise.

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The author is talking about the wonder he possesses for the form and colour of the tiger, which he says illuminates the forest and is so strong and invincible only an immortal could have created him. The author asks which blacksmith's workshop furnace formed him, asking what anvil and chain could have wrought him as though his shape was beaten out of iron metal, and marvels at the power of the hands and feet of the artisan who must have made this strong cat. The poet says that at the end of the creation process, when the stars were formed and flung down their arrows of light sprinkling the heavens with tears of gratitude for being created, the poet asks if God could have smiled upon such a terrible creature such as the tiger. Could it be possible that the same person made both the carnivorous tiger and the herbivorous lamb? With the same hands?"

"When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons on the Sabbath, saying that no work was to be done that day, and that he disobeyed the commandment. Jesus replied, "Can Satan cast out Satan? Nobody can break and enter a strong man's house. If a house is divided against itself it cannot stand. The man who built his house on the sands watches it wither away, but the man who built it on a rock, seeth it stand for many days, even when it is ravaged by the elements.

Sarai interpreted Isiah 3. "The prophet says that the people of Judah have become too proud, that they are as tall and arrogant as stone walls and interminably tall cedars and oaks. He says the gardens people have built and chosen, wherein they walk, will be brought to humility. He says their women are haughty, walking along with outstretched necks and flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles, therefore the lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion, the lord will make their scalps bald."

What do you think this verse means, my friends? Asked Sarai. "I think it means that it's bad to be stuck in one's ways too much, to be too dependent on routine, rather than on the voice of God, the promptings of the holy spirit. I think it also means that one should be careful how one comports one's body, that flirting when one is not financially independent could be counterproductive. I also think it has more to say about the writer and the patriarchal system in which he thinks, than the women themselves. Perhaps it was not desirable for the men in power, for women to make their own choices in a society where the men made all the decisions for everyone, just like it is here, where marriages, business deals and ceremonies, are all initiated by men, and the commerce between them.

Is the tiger proud? Or is it just majestic? It lives a hard life, but foists undue hardship on other people, just like the Taliban. Was it indeed the same God that made both man and woman, the father and the mother? Or are we looking for a different side of God, the one who initiated the creation of women, the power which Mohammed Ali Jinnah speaks of being separate and different, and perhaps more affecting than the power of the pen or the power of the sword? Are women powerful merely because of the power they wield in terms of domestic relationships? There is something else, something we have not yet theorised. We know they have capacities to endure suffering that men

have not, capacities to endure hardship that men find hard to comprehend. Moreover, their understanding, and their experience of suffering affords them the ability to empathise, to build others up, to turn policy and technicalities to the advantage of those who need it most, to serve the people, to make methodology, build it from the bottom up, because they themselves are at the bottom of the social totem pole and it takes people understanding that position to build an equitable society.

Second of all, are we underestimating the significance of domesticity in the lives of people who work? Certainly, under the purview of capitalism, the women who work at home readying everything for their male breadwinners are indispensable, even to the capitalist owners of companies, for it is only because of the work of the women that working men are able to reproduce their existence and come to work the next day.

If one argues this, we should argue that capitalists pay not only their male workers, but their wives as well, because they keep house and protect their men against disease.

Even David revealed that although the lord filled the bellies of rich and hard hearted men, with his hidden treasure, David was content with the likeness of the lord, which he saw in every morning. Later he says that the lord had established him over the ends of the earth, and made his enemies run from him. But all this was not without considerable effort on David's part, spying, grazing flocks, instituting law and judgements, and leading armies against their enemies. Must we as women train our minds to be razor sharp, so that they can handle the complexity of policy and the intricacy of engineering and technology, but not forget our love, to form fellowship to communicate with the minds of the children we teach.

And indeed, a good question now is how to operate without regarding anyone as our enemies. There are those who are dangerous to us, yes, but how to bring them over to our side so that we can work out a collective redemption? Jesus said, pray for your enemies, for that would be to heap hot coals upon their heads that you whom they wish ill, only wish them well?

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Bacchhoos. You should be kind to all of them. They all belong to Jesus. And even as adults, we're also bacchhoos in some way or another. And we all belong to Jesus.

That lady who sweeps in-front of your house is kind and beautiful. She sweeps with a dewdrop glittering on her cheek, her eyes lowered, looking at how the broom sweeps. She looks sort of like Khushboo, your junior ballet teacher.

When she looks at people she approves of, fire emanates from her face and arms, like the blazing of justice. You must speak to her tomorrow about not working in the rain.

I saw a dancer with green eyes like marbles, or like spring pools, or like geysers, light chrysoprase, looking mockingly out of a carved, round, jovial face.

Hair like redwood pines, like clay brick, like sequoia wood. A body like the very mist on a balsam boat, drifting down the foggy river. A dancer par excellence.

The artists all try to paint her.

Is it really possible to paint the heraldess of the earth's bounties? Is it really possible to paint the lime, mint, jade green of the young sapling leaves, the turning, pivoting, falling, pirouetting branches, laden with sap and white and piercing at the core?

At least, it is possible to try, bathed with sea green, benthic, moss covered.

The trunks of gold and brown leaves of emerald coin jewels, rippling water of black jade and carved granite. Fish leap in and out like needles sewing together a skirt.

She climbs the mountain like a stork, an athlete, seeing the woody, pebble strewn paths and clinging to the steep and narrow steps with her fists and her pick.

The Lord has richly recompensed me.

Pigeons with grey-blue black striped papered wings, long, elegant necks scattered with glittering sheens of green and magenta pink and violet, running in flocks down the moss-covered striated cement, grooved with the whisking bulrush needles of a broom.

Sparrows, bouncing cheerfully, their brown and white speckled feathers brown breasted, beige winged, alighting here and there without fear. Mynahs splashing their green and brown and white dear bodies with puddle water.

Above them, rise the rooves of emerald palm leaves, shadowed night jasmine bushes, and acacia trees. And the blue, clouded sky arches in a dome above it, layered with grey gosling down.

This is where many roiling summers, springs, monsoons autumns and winters past, the world shrouding the soul of God like a pashmina wool shawl, and He shone through like a beacon of light behind gauze in a kerosene lamp.

The fruits of discipline are sweet.

The amrud tree has red and orange leaves; among the green, like a green papaya, ripening. A stalk like a long, sooty chimney or wooden broom, branching like the strands of a river, or a maiden's braided locks. It stands straight and tall like a noble youth, coloured with the trappings of a peasant's makeshift garments, sewn for use, and the rosy cheeks the picture of health and good stewardship, digging furrows in the soil, sweeping and raking leaves from the verandah to compost them in the fields, wielding a stick to beat away snakes, watching the gliding sunbirds fly into the sky with abandon, soaring and dipping on their arched wings.

"Fast, for then shall thy health break forth, spring forth as the morning, it all its radiance," he says, a mystical youth.

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"Lack of development," wrote Sheila, "Is linked to many ills. Among them, infant mortality in cold regions, stomach infections and diarrhoea, maternal mortality, lack of proper nutrition, leading to many other health related issues such as under-weight-ment, bone problems, anaemia, psychological disorders and lack of productivity. Illiteracy is also related to low consumption of energy and electricity. This leads to adherence to superstition, trusting quacks for curing illnesses, witch hunting, lack of remunerative employment, ignorance as to proper public health practices, inability to escape one's immediate reality with books," the list went on and on.

Sheila sighed at how clinical it sounded. But it was true. "Everyone should have the opportunity to really develop themselves, to learn and discover and reason."

Never, however, assume that God is with you more than with an illiterate person, just because you know how to read and write and they don't. The Lord loves them equally well and has been with them from way before they were born, in every task and challenge they ever faced, which may have been greater than any struggle you have had to surmount.

Now, I shall write about the month of Shaban. It is in the month of Shaban that the Angels of the Lord write down in the books which souls will be born and which will die and be returned their lord after judgement within that year, for this reason, Mohammed fasted many days in the month of Shaban, before the month of Ramadan, when he also fasted, for he said that if that year his name was called by the angels, he would want it to be when he was fasting. This month, this year, roughly coincides with the month of Lent.

"For Easter, we will paint the eggs of chickens, and then, you will take them home for your mothers to fry them."

"We dwindle the yolk out from the bottom of the egg, at home, keep it in a satchel, and then bring the shell to class next day to make art on.

Sheila got out the meagre supply of paints and handed three brushes to three children to work with. The rest would wait their turn.

Rohina dipped her brush in blue paint and washed the egg shell in the colour. Blowing on it, it dried, and she applied a network of red lines on top of the evenly coloured outside.

Children, do you know the origins of this festival? Sheila asked. "Jesus, a great prophet, the son of Maryam, came down to earth, being born among us, to save us from our sins. Love your neighbour as yourself, he said. And do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This means that you should treat others as you wish to be treated, with kindness, compassion and dignity."

"What about treating others as you think they wish to be treated? Asked Mahmood.

"Well, that could work, but its similar, isn't it? And that might not always be the best way to treat them."

"Love your neighbour as yourself," he also said. "If this is the case, then one is not coveting one's neighbour's goods, for one would wish then as much for one's neighbours as for oneself, one would not see his ox falter or when his donkey falls by the wayside and withhold your help, one would lend him money without interest and would help in the building of his barns or his house, and watch over his homestead when he is on business, or on a visit.

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"One must always finish your chores and your duties before reading or writing," said Yasinia firmly. Otherwise, you are not being true to the bringer of your food. You must be true to the Lord of Work."

"Reading and writing are not work in the same sense, although they are manifestations of the divine order."

"Teaching children to read and write the Holy Book is work indeed, but you must continue to aid in your own chores as well. We cannot charge them so much as to afford a help."

I sit with my sister Sheila of an evening, and there are so many sparks of what she wants to do, so many lessons to enlighten young minds; the grate of the window makes a grilled shadow on the floor, and on the small suitcase, the pile of blankets and the printout of her master's thesis she had to go all the way to the nearest town to get. The leaves waving. She is a person that wants to be there for the most desolate, a soul that wants to bring a torch to sadness and emptiness, or a burning branch to loneliness, but she wants to synergize; she knows, God knows the people here have indeed much knowledge; they have the backing of faith, and the shield of Godliness, but like any well guided people still want to learn, want to climb from this heaven to the next, want to climb from this stage to the next along their way of destiny, from the driven, to the gnostic, from the hapless, to the intentional. And she will teach.

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"How do you think a plane flies? Sheila asked her class. It's the through the power of the fluid pressure of the air. Remember, pressure= force exerted/area of the surface upon which the force is exerted. Because the bottom of the wing had a slightly smaller area than the top of the wing, the force, which is the same through-out the air column, creates a higher pressure on the underside of the wing, and the wings are designed as such to support the entire body of the plane on this up-flux of air.

Pressure in a fluid is given by its height, multiplied by the constant roh, and multiplied by the force of gravity which acts to bring the gas or the fluid down. The constant roh is a function of the fluid's density, which is whatever mass occupies a unit volume of that gas.

The gravitational force felt as acted upon by any body, is a function of the masses of each of the bodies experiencing this attraction, divided by the square of the radii of each of the bodies. Hence, because the larger number is often on the denominator, the force of attraction or gravitation experienced by bodies tends to be very slight.

In the case of electrons orbiting round a nucleus, the force of gravitation is very low. The attractive force present is more due to the opposing charges between positively charged protons and negatively charged electrons. When these two particles are in close proximity, the force of attraction holds them together, but the electrons have an acceleration that prevents them from getting sucked into the protons entirely. The Rutherford model proposed that electrons have a constant velocity, which would mean that they would spiral towards the nucleus, but this does not happen, proving that they have an acceleration.

“Whence do they get this acceleration from ma’am?” was a question.

“Electrons are known as energetic particles. It’s not known where the original energy came from, but energy can neither be created nor destroyed, so there is a finite amount of energy in the universe. It is spread in different things, and when you heat a material, say a metal, you supply energy to its electrons, causing them to flow or travel faster. A metal is a special case of material, because its electrons are already free flowing and do not remain around the same nucleus for long, but travel among varying nuclei. When the metal is heated, once causes a current of electrons to flow from the region of higher temperature to the region of lower temperature, which is called an electric current, or a transfer of energy through negatively charged electrons.

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The webs of a spider’s home, shimmering and swaying between the forked branches of a mango tree, pierced by mists, whispering in the wind, cocooned as a fruit itself below the emerald green leaves.

The impress of a palm, and fingertips, a mountaineer’s wealth, the only sign of his daughter, that he carries in his breast pocket.

The scaffolding of a building scraped for painting, and putty filling of cracks, straining with worker’s drilling, mixing whitewash and cementing, careful of their balance.

It is always young men that do this work, moreover poor young men, whose bodies have little enough heft to keep them standing like a doorframe, suspended in a house.

They watch the pigeons preening and cleaning beneath their wings with their beaks, ruffling their feathers and necks golden and violet and green, like maidens bending their necks backwards to hang up washing in the hot breeze.

Her brother a construction worker, leaning, leaning, hardly had a harness made of more than two strands of fraying hemp rope, but yet he climbed with agility to the top of the scaffolding, like a prince rappelling up Rapunzel’s golden stair. Others, sitting on the ground, mixing cement, ranging, scrounging for gravel with their shovels, sifting it with their sieve. Their bodies meet as they dig and sift, they lean towards one another like leaning trees with separate roots, like men drinking from a tub.

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We know that God gives us our parents, or that he gives to parents their children, so we cherish this as our inheritance, and hold the family a sanctified institution, ever worthy of care and the heart of society. Indeed, under your mother's feet is heaven, and under your father's direction, you will find success if he is a wise one.

It is said that he who obeys not his mother and his father shall come to destruction, but that one who leaves mother and father for the sake of the son of God will find a great reward in heaven.

And if disobeying mother and father means doing charitable deeds and fasting when it is in the means of the family and in the health of the actor, these actions are then desirable.

But in all things understand that a family is the artwork, the creation of the divine.

And be frugal when deciding in day-to-day matters.

Of your household, be frugal and open to the gifts of grace which drops from heaven, the light that opens from your windows, the breeze that spills onto your cheeks, the bulbuls that give music to your ears, the fragrance from the tamarind flowers that perfume your nostrils.

And most of all, use your wise mind, use your faculties which you have developed at work, and the education you have received at school, to make your decisions, and to inform your interactions with your workmates, your business partners, your friends and relatives, your brothers and sisters and parents.

And we don't say thank you much, because we believe we always remember when someone has done a kind deed for us, and that we will reciprocate it in some way or another before much time has gone by.

And if you are a moderate person, in eating and drinking, you still must fast occasionally, either by giving up something dear, or by going on bread and water for a day in the week.

And you must not cull or eat meat, unless your life depends on it. Meat is not for us human beings, who have a mind and hands to achieve their dreams."

And even if it is just looking at a leaf, at how the chlorophyll melts into dryness, or a parasite makes bumps on the surface, the arid blade the colour of faded moss or watercolour washed paper, curling like aflame, rippling like an ocean, its stems and veins rigid snakes, the surface bright emerald and the smell mellow, woody, mouldy, spinach, henna, rainfed, or mildewy, then look at it with proper appreciation and love and allow its hollows and sines to slip into your own skin, so you become a hybrid creature and can speak in tongues."

"Trust you to say something completely out of the way, Najeeba!"

"Trust Imtiaz to say something completely sensible but totally alien to me," she replied. "I wish, indeed that I had grown up tightly wound with traditions, but perhaps that was its characteristic, I was always learning something new, even within a circle of tight discipline of academics, though I always missed it, as the tradition has its place."

"Najeeba!" he called. "I'll give you a tradition. Come dance with me!"

"Let us make everything alright for everyone with the careful placement of our steps, and the unity of our gate to the tune of this music," she said quietly, as he approached near.

"I wish we could sequester the universe's hurts in our feeling bodies," he said.

"I can feel this," she said. "Destruction for you is destroyed. My battle is won."

"If I was your battle then I have nothing to do but thank God a thousand times."

"Thank God that you're alive my friend, that you're alive. And yes, you were part of my battle. But you have fought against me more than I against you."

"Not true, my dear, not true."

"We will forgive and forget, Imtiaz."

"Now, it is time for that," he said.

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"The mystics believed that the entire universe can be sequestered in the body of a prophet, or of a true believer; that their veins become the bylanes and thoroughfares of the world and their collarbones the hills and furrows of the fields, their forehead the plateaus emerging from the eyes which are glimpses of the ocean. The hair clouds and winds, the skin, the lips a tabernacle of pearl

teeth, of seats in a synagogue. The limbs branches of trees, swaying, graceful, growing. The dwelling of that one and this one housed in one's heart, and how if one keeps one's feet in line and stands silent in a secluded space one can even calm the anger of one not present," Najeeba said.

Imtiaz continued: "Suppose one did this, fasting, and the worlds' wars were healed, their hatred undone. The power of one man's discipline and artistry can be great. Mistrust turned into cooperation for mutual benefit, into synergies and alliances for the profits of all concerned."

"But this is not a dumb power, it speaks and in the long run uses intelligence. It examines those it seeks to win, searches them, their eyes minds, hearts, as a lover searches the perceptions and experiences of his or her beloved.

It opens up their breast, and looks into their visions and their words, their fears and their sorrows, their dreams and their trespasses, and attempts to make a road for them, arrow straight, flintlock swift, pointed, tailormade, God's plan for their lives, demanding they use their skill, hard work and imagination along the way."

Najeeba said: "The power of interpretations of signs, events and texts, is also one that you gain as you travel down this road. And remember that if he so chooses, God can shut off the sun by clouds and darken the stars. No one that has gone against His way has ever prospered."

"The eagle of the cliffs sees everything with his naked eye, because he is self-contained."

"His call searches the valleys. His young can hear him from afar."

"The shadow of his wings glides over everything. Thus, he owns all."

"What about the seagull, is it not meeker, refraining from meat?"

"The seagull is perpetually bobbing upon the ocean with his companions. Unlike the eagle, which goes where the wind takes him, the seagull is attached to one beach, one castle, one promontory."

"You're generalising and essentialising at the same time. That's a crime, my dear."

"The seagull screeches. And sings, its speech is sweet and sauntering."

"The eagle calls only in desolation."

"You're creating an abject. Come on, can't we imagine a more connected world? Nothing happens in isolation. It is your grief, your helplessness, that calls the eagle to empathise with none other than you and others who are sad too. There is nothing inherently mournful in a poor eagle itself."

"Thinking differently is fun. I'll try to apply what you just said to all my thoughts, and let's see, feel better already."

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A beggar lady walking, her child in tow beside her, her hair curly and draggled around her dark, misty frame, her eyes be telling all the beguiling charm of a monsoon forest: green, brown, gold foliage nodding and dripping with rainwater, resounding with the haunting calls of mynahs, parakeets, sunbirds and eagles.

Sunlight piercing through the canopy of interlocked branches, the meche of twigs and leaves, the pouring torrents of mists, light and cloud in green funnels, venturies of light. The thick forest jungle is packed like a notebook of paper, with love and stories of its lights, its looks, its times of day and its creatures.

How like a cathedral, echoing with the choir melodies and the chants of devotion, its stained-glass windows, its light filtering leaves, casting dapples of brightness and shadow, play and music on all.

Beautiful sequins of silver and gold, dancing atop the water; like the sun had spilled a thousand fraktaline diamonds upon it.

The grey sea, roaring breakers, arriving and arriving, dashing upon the rocks and generating gushes of foam.

Every time I look behind, it is the same, although we have the phrase "sea changes". This place where I spent a large part of my childhood and growing up years, it smiles at me and says, "I will ever be the same. Do you come back to me, I will refresh you always."

The lawn and grassy path, riddled by a netted pavement, like an arbour for the vegetation to grow through. A large, knotted and vigorous tree, with thick, sinuous trunk and branches has fallen down, and the grass is always longer underneath where the tree has fallen. But I remember that grass always being longer and lusher underfoot than the rest, when I walked under the shade of that tree when it stood alive and strong. Similarly, another tree has fallen down near the middle of the lawn.

Water eroding, flowing, passing, guttering. Translucent, clear, pure. Skipping over the sharp pebbles of the stream, making them rounded. Sunlight slips through it, the dallying shadows of a network of light. Ebony trees grow at the sides of the stream, along with juniper-conifer, larch, beech and aspen, tulip trees and maple trees, their supple saplings shedding five-pointed pentacle star-shaped leaves, reddish brown and pinkish orange, smelling of candied apples and wine. Golden laburnum grows in fires of sparks set against the blue heavens. The mountains rise against the deep, dark green forest, rising in majesty of grey rock and scree, to be topped with caps of snowy white peaks, within which faint clouds lodge, feathery and light.

My name is Aspen, and I am called the storyteller of the band. I communicate with rocks, stones, and lichen on the bark-y trunks of trees and even moss on their roots, and with shrubs, birds, trees and clouds. All the creations of God have I asked to divulge their stories, and I tell them at night around the fire, to my younger siblings. Thus, I chart the Lord's creation, and no one who has ever gone against the Way has ever prospered in a lasting manner.

Here is water's tale: It wakes earlier than most and does the most work; watering fields, meadows and forests in little channels, trickling here and there, riddling the landscape in a network of silver, ductile lines. When the translucent white glacier suffers to see light of day, it melts into a watery trickle, feeding these streams. Before it melts, it is the colour of a snowy, husky dog in the arctic, or the fang of a lynx, or the downy, reddish-pink belly of a wolf snarled with white fur.

The fields are full of poppies, wheat and barley, buck-wheat and pearl millet (jowar), dotting it with yellow brown, beige and white among the sparkling, striving khaki and emerald -green veridian.

The meadows are filled with shamrocks, downy and delicate, perking up among the long blades of grass, and chrysanthemums and honeysuckle, like honeycombs of gold sitting atop the swards.

Water rises and straightens her kerchief, saying, although I have woken early and nursed so many crops, flowers and roots, I demand not a pay-raise, but security of paid work, the effort I have put in will increase the productivity of all the children I have nourished. The sludge from the coalmine upstream has already polluted the water, and she wrings her hands to get the slippery stains of oil and muck from them, wailing like a banshee washing her family's clothes in the stream.

Baikal bullfinch, blue-cheeked-bee-eater, little bittern, Eurasian common blackbird, blue whistling thrush, which lives in the mountains of central Asia, South Asia, China, and South East Asia. It is recognised by its loud human like whistling song at dawn and at dusk. It feeds on the ground, along streams and in damp places foraging for snails, crabs, fruits and insects. Then there are the corn buntings and grey necked buntings.

The Bodhicitta says, "You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, smarter than you think, and loved more than you'll ever know."

Blue cheeked bee eater, its neck and forehead plumaged with parrot green, its eyebrows pencilled with canary yellow, brushed with pearly white, its wings deep ocean blue and swept with ling filamented feathers, dotted with dew drops.

It hopped from barren branch to barren branch, gripping the rough bark-coloured twigs, flouncing its wings and alighting here and there in a great gust of fluttering, like the strong, yet delicate stuttering of the rivers' mist; which rises in the midmorning, when the water is risen in the air in droplets of a silvery sheen. The cold wind rushes from the steady groves to fill the vacuum.

The bee eater finally flies off into the sun, silhouetted against it. My heart is lighter for having beheld its antics, and cheeped at it, and received excited talking in reply.

The little bittern like a camel walking, its humps laden with treasure and its neck guttering and undulating. The Baikal bullfinch like a little bush of dried brown leaves, topped with goat's fleece, warbling and whistling in a silvery sound like a violin being tuned after it is strung.

Broken teeth and ragged hair,

Damp, bedraggled, wet feathers,

Eyes, slanting as the slopes of mountains,

Cheeks, curving like the banks of a river,

Blushing like apples ripening in the sun,

Or like ruddy pathways of volcanic rocks,

Which athletes scaled, with their picks,

Rucksacks and peeling, climbing shoes,

Picking up dust from a higher clime,

Which they shake off at home and nourish

Their gardens with, the strange, hybrid soil.

Grass grows like magic green spindle, always in fresh tufts and breathtaking, breathing, perky and it is all over, tumbling, spreading, somersaulting all over these grounds, these lawns of delight. It is like a picture from a storybook, but far more beautiful and graver to imagine. It is a garden of delight, like Firdaus.

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The buildings were green and blue and pink and brown, off white and caramel with bare transmission wires arching way up above them, and with grilled iron windows so different from the carved wooden screens and doors of the village. In the heat of the summer, there were fans in the city house rooms, unlike Sheila's attic room in the village, where they would simply sit at their desks studying and feel the sweat drip off their necks onto their dresses and drum onto the floor, when it gets too hot, although the sincere work of reading, sewing, ploughing, washing dishes in cold river water and chat and prattle with your friends, certainly distracts one from the heat, just as good works averts us from the fires of hell.

There was a solution for everything in the city, but then again, there were more difficulties and challenges to surmount. There was no stream from whose banks one could dip one's buckets on a pole and collect water, but instead, public taps that often ran dry in the summer, and whose water was of questionable hygiene and had to be boiled thoroughly before consumption.

There was a considerable amount of soot in the air, from the exhaust of the cargo trucks, a few cars and motorcycles that plied thoroughfares and streets, and from the cooking fires in the slums where people still used coal and cowdung, or dead branches to fuel their stoves. Of course, not everyone had graduated to using liquefied petroleum gas cylinders, which gave off nothing but carbon dioxide.

The city was full of craters that bombs had made in it, and that nobody, including the government, had found the money to repair or refill. Children played among them, gathering shrapnel, which they then traded and kept. The determination and innocence of life continues to flow through the veins of the landscape.

Then, the street markets were full of vendors, more than Sheila had ever seen at any one particular point in time. They sold carpets, vegetables, fruits, rice, lentils, chickens, goats (she shuddered at these). They also sold trinkets made of turquoise and lapis lazuli, veils for women, the sky blue burqas with netting to cover the eyes, recommended by those in power at the time, and doves flew at every noon around the mosque to gather the wheat grain that people scattered for them.

They also sold cowrie shells, which buyers gathered one by one and sewed onto their tunics for remembrance of their Sufi trainers, and which they fingered as a kind of rosary for to remember their precious erupting chants which rose unbidden from mosques, where they sometimes gathered and learned, adding a depth or a new dimension to the air, making it a tunnel, or a prayer niche set into a spacious dargah, from where the winds flew and the hawks gathered.

Sitting on a bench outside the mosque was like sitting on a beach, washed by such a bottomless blue that one could drink deeply looking up into it. The drowning blue was indigo, enamel, fierce, violet, sapphire. It was an entity of its own as it drained of light like a cup drain of milk, becoming studded with stars and peppered with bright, point like planets, forming a pattern of latticework like one of window frames at home.

Sheila said, "Children know so much already, that they have as much to teach us as we have to teach them.

Khadija said: "I think we still have more to teach them though."

And Sheila said, "You're probably right. I think the laws of motion are the most important principles to teach, as everything's built on them, really."

Don't forget wave theory, said Khadija. "Photosynthesis depends on photons, so we eat by the waves that propagate throughout the universe."

"I wish more people studied both arts and sciences like you, Khadija," said Sheila.

"Hey, thanks, you're the first person who doesn't think I'm a scatterbrain for doing that."

"Of course, you're not."

"Have you read the thing I slipped under your door?"

"Yes, I have. The one that says physical activity and menial tasks increase the capacity for innovation?"

"Indeed, I noticed that when I was growing up in Nuristan. Nothing could go well for you unless you did your chores, it impacted one's ability to study as well. At the same time, you must approach reading and writing in a focussed way, taking God as your guide, and he is sure to bestow discipline, concentration, and perseverance, and someday a career guided by your learning."

"Yeah. We make jobs for ourselves, carve places for ourselves in the gaps of service that need to be filled; there are so many. Here's a question: Do you really believe today's children in Afghanistan need a modern education?

Sheila thrust her essay on modernising education in the country under the nose of her friend.

"Yes of course they, do, but so much of the world and inequality and dependence on fossil fuels and locomotive transportation and excess mass production needs to be changed too. You can't just ask that question without admitting that the world they need to learn about needs to be changed so that it does not poison their minds with over ambition, self-pity and desperation. The articles read:

"According to Arturo Escobar's book Encountering Development, the Making and Unmaking of the Third world, 26% of the world's population lives in developed countries, however accounts for a whopping 78% of the worlds production of goods and services, 81% of the energy consumed, 87% of the world's armaments, and 70% of the world's chemical fertilizers. The quantum of energy consumption of the average US resident is as much energy consumed by the following: 7 Mexicans, 55 Indians, 168 Tanzanians, and 900 Nepalis. That is not however, to beg the question as to whether Afghanistan's children need a rationalist education.

In many underdeveloped Nations, money spent on armaments well exceeds expenditure on human health. The money spent on one modern fighter plane can finance forty thousand rural health centres in a developing nation.

In Brazil, the energy and resources consumed by the top 20% is 33 times that consumed by the 20% poorest, and this gap is increasing daily. Rather than being used for primary human consumption, 47% of the world's grain production is used for animal feed, the same amount of which grain could feed 2 billion people. Brazil's farms growing soy beans could feed 40 million people if sown with corn and beans. The worlds' six largest grain merchants control 90% of the world's grain production and distribution, when several million people have died of hunger within the Sahel region alone in the 1980's. And while the South American tropical rainforest gives 42 %of the world's plant biomass and oxygen, 600,000 acres are destroyed yearly in Mexico, with the same amount in Columbia every year.

This suggests that Afghanistan and other least developed countries should aspire, not to modern capitalism, but to a form of government and economy that is human development oriented, putting an emphasis on education, healthcare, service sector, and agriculture, rather than focussing on manufacturing. Of course, we should produce health products, fertilizers and farming implements where needed. But the emphasis should be on primary production, knowledge economy and services. If we must indeed set up factories for other things, which we may, workers should be given the opportunity to work part time and take college level classes if they haven't already, reading and studying in their free time and gathering together at night. Nobody should be allowed to be overworked, or to go hungry. An understanding of the way the world works from the point of view of the worker, should be complemented in the same person by an understanding of the way the world works from the point of view of the student, the chemist, the physicist, the anthropologist."

She stood on the street corner with Abigail, talking about school, specifically about Rumi and Hafez; how the poet was always there for the reader, how lovers don't just meet somewhere, they're in each other all along; that where there is ruin, there is hope for treasure, that one should raise their words, not their voice as it is rain that grows flowers not thunder, and that one should sell one's cleverness and buy bewilderment.

Indeed, said Sheila. "My favourite pastime is studying literature and philosophy in the afternoon, and then looking out of the window to see the pigeons flocking on the bread my neighbours cast onto their balcony, and then bothering Tinaz Jan to tell me how she made the lunch she just served her family.

Sometimes she uses turnips and carrots and boils them with rice and sometimes she thickens the flour with tiny grains of flour. On other days, she makes potato for the pot and gives some naan to each of us to dip into the common pot.

She liked dialectics. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. First, an explanation of what something is, then and explanation of what something is not, then a gathering together of the two perspectives, to form an understanding of things that is deeper and more interconnected in specific ways than earlier was assumed.

A second, fiery gulmohur sending its trellised compound leaves in streaks, its arms and trunk gnarly, day, flashing to the earth like a bolt of lightning unyolked,, the peepul tree a woman with a waterfall for hair, ferns for jewellery, hanging dewy gossamer webs she exuded as a happy light

As the elf found this world, he played in the lap of it, and she delighted in the stirring of its skirts, strung as they were with tangerines, peas and suns and moons.

She arose, she made three paces of the garden wood grove. She rolled the rocking of the sea, her hips billowing of the heavy netted foam. Her walk would quench your thirst. "Shall I take thee on my ways, she said to the land where the sun never sets, and the stars gleam, brightly on the frigid ice?" she asked. Her cheeks were budding, ruddy, like blood on snow or white petals kissed with cherry wine/juice, her eyes openend like a pair of doves fluttering and holding a braided sprig between their beaks.

They looked up at the swilling blue sky and saw the hawks swilling around, like a taut bow poised for shooting an arrow of the sun's gleams, lances of splendour, banded by black in the centre where the nose of the flight-wings would rest, or the slipstream would buffet, and the curve of its wings like bent arches of chestnut fashioned and striped with chisels of hazelwood. They turned in the powdery ice iris blue like spears of amethyst, weathervanes of topaz, crowning the brows and the gleaming temples of the sky's wind/worn/ rain-washed face.

Sunset dust lorn and comet, sickle streaked, scratched, star sprinkled, speckled

Her hair was surrounded by the twelve stars of various shapes.

She drew closer to the window, where the liquid sky like molten or blushed mother of pearl, laid out like liquid,flowing milk and separating out into wavering feathers, or like segments of hair, each ratcheting into one another after they have divide, gable like into the roof of a pagoda which builds itself though ever smaller but with the same strokes, skywards.

***

"A striking, zig zag, ragged cliff, illuminated suddenly by a flash of phosphorescent thunder, a string of pearls in the sky, of hanging showery oysters, pink and lavender and royal angora blue in their flashing, purity of snow and icicles, sleet and rain and hail and freeze, frigid dust, hanging iridescent sheen, a peacock's neck.

"Tall and willowy, and tree green, with an ibis shape and urn jar neck, against the turquoise sky, jay and kingfisher, and blue macarel and whale, a slate ocean and stirring lily padded water; such was the swan-like body of that long-plume tailed, winded bird, airy like a duster, showy like a flamingo, swift like an ostrich, rapid like and eagle, and innocent as a quail, fiery like a phoenix.

Like the holy leaves of a peepul, peeking like a cobra, were the standing tail, the waving palms of its wings, shooting glistening, jade, fronded, cerulean ringed irises and sun golden eyed, rising to watch and to bestow luck, blessings, honey and speed, and joy and spirit."

Najeeba asked each student to read out their poem, sitting in a circle and then discuss the fruits of their labour together.

I've got a question for you, Sarai, said Tariq. Surely the bird in your poem is not simply a mascot, to bestow good fortune, but is also an entity, a creature in itself, that exists for its own sake?

Dear Tariq," said Sarai. "When written from a woman's point of view, we would write thus, because women must always exist for others.

(Elaborate more on how the description refers to women.)

"It's artefact of its authorship, marked by the condition of its creator?"

"No, it's to make you think."

"Next poem: Shaheen."

"The specks of wheat inhabit her, the rolling acacia, pine encrusted valleys, fettered with moss, studded with pine cones and layered with nuts, mountains tunnelled with shingles of winged sprouts and flying rooves of endless, curling shooting ratchets, tendrils, pagodas, vines.

The vines curled up the rocks like rapelling climbers, darting beanstalks, shooting peas and lentils, a rod of striking lightning, bolding boulder into a galvanized haze, glazing pumice, bussing a gleaming sheen, a jewel brightness, of mellow amber, of emerald malachite."

"Explain."

"The rocks are the woman," said Shaheen. "And the trees and vines are what clothe her. Just like you have tomb raider with the actress wearing pants that essentially fit her, in the same way, you have creepers that encircle the woman's limbs, unlike the shalwar kameez in our nation. I'm not criticizing one or the other, I'm just exploring them. And the woman could be the women of Afghanistan, who have so many chores out in nature to perform, that it begins to grow on them literally."

"Good," said Sheila. "You might like to also look into how narratives of romanticization of the pastoral woman has lead to her exploitation by men from the outside."

"I probably thought of that, but at the back of my mind."

"Well, perhaps we need to bring it to the fore-front so that we call out instances and prevent it from happening in the future."

Not just calling out instances; we need to change the atmosphere, the intersubjective ambience among all people to prevent such instances.

"The kind of oppression that actually occurs against women is of a singular kind, it would render them silent, invisible. Even when they wear body revealing clothes, which would seem to make them hyper-visible, though especially at that time, they must not merely be an entity of a man's desires, rather than speaking their own words, in their own song. So, to a certain extent, the man's desires are viewed as concurrent with theirs, and there is little space for true reciprocity.

"Young women and men," said Najeeba. "I want you to think about the different roles silence plays for the varying oppressed classes. Striking is a form of silence, a mode of resistance, although there's usually a lot of rhetoric around it. But most of all for those who are not organized, silence is a form of resistance that allows the victim to maintain their sense of justice and sovereignty when they know that what they have to say would not be listened to, or of course, when they would be further punished for speaking out. It is often not recognized as resistance, but is sometimes called passive resistance, like how Mahatma Gandhi and Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan encouraged people to fight the British colonial power by temperance, soul force and mutual engagement. In this case, silence is not simply a means to disengage, but is also a means to participate more deeply, uncovering the core, the root cause of the issue, of the dispute , and revealing it to both the victims and the perpetrators. It is a non-violent form, and reveals more about the foibles of the perpetrators than the shortfalls of its victims. When women are silent, they are saying, let's get on with life, let's move beyond this oppression, let's open up spaces for ourselves and possibilities, independent of this aggression.

Sometimes silence is a way of accessing a deep and forgiving place, one that once used will displace all forms of oppression, will heal the schisms that came in the first place to engender them.

But active resistance, raising a voice against injustice should always be a priority. Silence is a last resort.

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Who am I, I am the path's dust, the crystal's powder, the grime's smoke, the wheel's rancour, rubber of the iron's rust, the stove's smothering lamp black, the coal's shield, the flame's hover, the tile's shimmer, the shingle's shine.

The moon's winter, the sun's summer, I am the fall's fruit, the spring's glimmer, Tasneem's fountain, the limestone mountain.

I am the scoop's shovel the gravel's hoe, the rubble's pile, the earthworm's glow, the turquiose's treads, the spade's snow, I am the watermelon rind, the juice's flow.

The branches wither, the leaves ragged, I am the vesture's fulness, I am the wind snagged, I am the cross-frame dragged, the candle's melt, the wind's strain, the leaf's vein, the shoulder's knotting, the wheel's shattering, the weather vane's spinning.

I am the sand's steam, and the tar's darkness, and the ocean's heft and the minnow's dart, I am the coral's carmine, and the orchid's feet, I am the pink crocus's strength and the rose's heat.

The seaweed's hair and the abalone shell's dangling wavering, the oyster's rainbow, and the fish scales narrowing, the slitting of the net and the string's tear, the fin's tangling.

"The sun's golden rays splashing, fins glancing, braids spinning, circlet light dancing, web netting, lace foam prancing, heated veins tangling, vines dense, tightly knotting, gnarled, branching.

Roots curling, twining, swirling, milling, snaking, unfurling, rappling, grappling groundnuts growing emerging, swallowing, rippling, entangling, entrancing; mingling rambling."

The sweet crumbling pea that sprouted, and grew, and became a trellising bean plant, started out from a red-green marble; an embryo, a seed, and when it had absorbed enough water that its skin was no longer wrinkled, when the sunlight had warmed its shoulders and chest, its heart put forward a tendril, a sprout, a tentative umbilical cord, to search among the fields of mist and light, to spin sugar and food from the rays of sunlight, and the layers of wavering heat.

A bunch of shrivelling, yellowed bean pods, hanging next to the rose plants, carnations and gardenias. A watermelon rambling and rumbling softly in the garden, its vine and tendrils sprouting, its large, corrugated lined elephant ear leaf spreading across its head and giving shade to many of the other plants. Tomato vines climbing up stakes stuck in the crumbling brown, dewy earth, reaching up to the searing, gelid, water colour powder blue sky. A box of seeds, with flax seeds scattered around it. I will pick them up and pour them back into the box, grateful for their presence.

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A memory, of Najeeba's youth.

She heard, "Allah has said: when thou eatest and drinkest, have remembrance of me.

When thou art petitioned to help your brothers and sisters, remember that I am your father and the giver of all good things which you do possess. When you marry, have remembrance that I am nearer to you than the veins in your neck, than even your next breath.

When you walk in the darkness with a page upheld infront of you, take care to stare at the page, focussing all of your energies upon it, for it may be that I will make its contents known unto you.'

***

"Where do I go from here?" Shaheen asked in a looping question after the class broke up.

"I'm heading over to work," said Wahida. "If you want to walk with me. Let's not ignore historical materialism, the application of material consciousness to life and relationships." Shaheen could tell she wanted company.

Shaheen refused the hasty smoke, but was inspired by the conversation. "I epitomize Fabian's writing, in that you accord me time even though you're in a hurry," she said happily.

"I thought it was interesting how Fabian says that in according studied peoples their own time, we deny that they belong to our time and simultaneously alienate them," Wahida finished her thought. "From sharing relatedness, time, as coevals."

Shaheen frowned. "Let's make sure that when we're together, we really share time."

"Ever thought of the neo-rich? I myself would not want to belong to neoliberal time, instant, fast paced; I need my cognizance, I need my time," Wahida added. "At the same time, if I withdraw myself as a student from other parts of society, just because of my class or gender identification, I deny myself access to that kind of power, of entitlement, of cohabitation, to influencing those who so desperately need the charm of people like us? What happens? Do I become like a shadow, a ray of sunshine illuminating the dust in an empty room? No! I must wage the warfare of ideology, but also of lived life, of sharing words and acts and morsels with other fellow students and of informing myself and experiencing and behaving in such a way as to bring intellectual and corporeal fruit of which all can partake."

"You must never be silent about your struggles, what you suffer, call the perpetrators out for it," Shaheen added. "But don't put yourself in their power, don't let them make you suffer. Always come back to us. Friends are a resource you can always take refuge in. We must take the time to make friends, to get to know them."

Wahida added: "To sum up the class, what would you say? I would say, some Western Anthropologists try to get to know other 'peoples' in the people's own terms, and not on their own terms. It is these academicians who reject historicism. Instead they hanker for explanation of systems or structures in a present synchronic set of relationships. To them, interpersonal time comes to constitute deviance, like what we're doing. Functionalism, relativism, are what appear when one examines the differences between studying time within a culture and between cultures. Looking at time WITHIN a culture and abstracting aspects YOU find interesting, classifying culture but it belongs to a specific part of history. But that never gets to heart of why they are where they are, what natural, political circumstances lead to their evolving such traditions and mores and lifeways. The people you are writing about are never the same as those you're writing for."

"The father to son relationship is a serious relationship, too much material and political power at stake. A joking relationship with one's Bhabhi if one is a man, with all the connotations that that attends. The relationship between a man and his wife is serious. But what we must not do is abstract from specific to general, or conscious to unconscious. Functionalists did this and were obsessed with the fundamental functions of maintaining order in society; they said that if one social practice dies out, that doesn't mean the need for the function disappears, which will be taken up by yet another institution or ritual. School now begins to take on family functions, wherein socialization of the child takes place within the setting of the educational institution and not only the immediate and extended families and tribes."

"The Italian communist we read in the Social Sciences, Antonio Gramsci argued that we must not necessarily equate modern hegemonic education with the control exerted by conservative power hegemony over the masses, as the spread of modern styles of instruction and rigour in education were essential to developing a heightened self-consciousness and self-knowledge, necessary for critical revolutionary thought, egalitarian and assertive interaction, economic independence and radical political activity. Is this really true? Radical thought happens even with the totally uneducated.

He also talked of the importance of learning history, the dealings people were involved in, and problems people faced in the past, allow one to see one's own life experience and concerns in the larger context, the larger setting of what has passed, leading to the present material conditions, mode of thinking and norms of action."

But yet I argue, the aspect of human agency, of universal human nature, of individuality, should not be ignored. Sometimes they can overcome and overturn history. Don't ever doubt that ordinary men and women's current behaviours can shape the outcome of political and economic occurrences affecting large numbers of people.

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."[i] They smiled at each-other, in a mischievous way, and scurried along their ways.

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Perched on the floor of a small room surrounded by light blue walls and an off-white ceiling painted with chuna whitewash, the limestone of quarries, one's knees pointed upwards. Surrounded by people who come to you as drug addicts, leave yogis, nevertheless who sit side by side now with the penitent peddlers, the perpetrators. A needle on the dust floor at one's side. Aware of the hungry eyes on the needle and syringe. How any moment one of them could seize it and run out of the room, never to come back.

"Instead of running away from your own breathing, I want you to own it, feel it, heave it as the tide religiously heaves every night and noon on the bed of the ocean, sweeping the beaches and scraping the bedrock." Giving the drug counsellors dreams, dreams on how to conduct themselves around the victims. "Instead of running away from your feelings, I want you to confront them. If it is anger, I want you to get up out of the room and run. Come back when you're ready. If it is sadness, allow it to seep into your body, the sequestration of heavy water, clearing your head and making it bright, sharp and clear seeing. If it is love, I want you to register it in your every limb, and hold, cuddle and stroke the air as if it were an object of affection. No one's looking at you, we're all dealing with our own feelings, so no one will judge you. We will be turning the actions into steps in a dance, and perform them on the summer-side student's festival, this July, so don't worry, your pain will become peans, and you will be treated with dignity and respect. .

Now, pick up a notebook and pencil and write down whatever thoughts come to your mind. What do you hear when you listen to yourself? When you pick up a conch shell you place it to your ear and hear a welling up inside of it. When you blow into it, you get the sounds of the sea, or of wolves howling in around mountain caves. Write your dreams in your words, your innermost desires, to be held, to hold, to provide for, to look after, to accomplish. Then put the paper under your head when you sleep at night, and kneel next to them, when you pray. Assuredly, your prayers will be answered. For healing, for deaddiction, for reunion.

People using kerosene lamps for light in slums and villages instead of electricity, and getting burned to death because of it. All it takes is the flick of a wrist, an offhand movement of the fingers, a jerk of the head, and one's veil or shawl slathers against the wick or shade or flame of the lamp, overturning it and letting spill hot oil all over, which then steadily burns, consuming. The prerogative of the first world over energy use, for lifestyle actually ending up ending the lives of people in the global south. White children collecting money for save the tiger projects in India, where man-eating tigers eat brown children. A not so tenuous connection, not so universally acknowledged.

Collective production in China steadily growing until the country is a leader in production, as well as population that drives this economy, producing things even the richest, most luxurious countries consume. No longer lagging behind, large chunks of its originally peasant population pulled out of or dragged out of abominable poverty, able to eat two or three meals a day, performing labour on the farm or in the factories in a more humane, less chattel like way.

Poor Tibet, its monasteries stormed, closed, its people stocked and working on assembly lines instead of producing good quality hand-made cottage-crafts at home. Second class citizens in their own nation, by virtue of ethnicity, of adherence to faith, of mother-tongue, of language.

When they left their houses, they left wearing their best clothes, and thus, the revolutionaries picked them out of the crowd and shot at them, and killed many. They did not know how to make war and how to pile clothes on top of themselves while making war, or to dress down so as not to be seen. Still leaves a lump in your throat, a block in your chest I can see, and cleaves our souls asunder like the pith of a tree is cut when an axe slices through it. Tears streaming down our faces that weep for our brethren worse than when we heard of their killing, in history class, than when we witnessed our own home Bamiyan Buddhas tombed out of our mountains, our heritage destroyed. But could it

ever be? It is extremism that convinces itself that it always has the last word, but it is the meek and gentle that survive and rear their heads in its cracks.

Revolution was certainly necessary in China, where the feudal lords had bled people dry since time immemorial, and it was only a miracle and their own blessed ingenuity that the labouring folk, the peasantry, had ever managed to survive through the ages, carrying their knowledge and tradition with them, passing them on to each new generation with each task, each necessity of work. We must celebrate the Chinese change of government. But whether revolution was necessary in Tibet is another question altogether. It would have to be investigated carefully.

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Sheds of innocent boys and men, weeping for all the dead and martyred in the U.S.'s search for Osama. Bitter that no development had been brought by that country even though the Taliban had helped them evict the Russian occupation.

Najeeba said to the soldier: "O my beloved, when you were injured, I watched over you, even when you were too delirious to know it, until you healed, so no one would disturb you. You were abandoned by neither woman nor God, don't you know? And when you awoke and groaned, and felt the wound in your chest, I dipped your tongue in water so that it would cease to be parched, and you could speak to us."

"Oh, my friend, could it be that I have such a caring companion as thee? For when I was asleep, I dreamed perhaps an angel had stooped to hear my pleas to live and was dressing my wounds carefully. She did so with skill and attentiveness. And her face was just like yours, aglow just so, her lips poised between speech and silence, her forehead between understanding and grief, compassion for the soldier, who was wounded, whom she could have left to the wayside to fester, but instead chose to take to her bosom and nurse as she would have done one of her own tribe."

Najeeba was ashamed to hear him speak thus, and told him so. His soldiery had grown up a fountain of many sighs form her chest, and many a gasp and blush of pleasure to her cheeks, and sparkle to her eye when the strong girl saw how the weak but improving soldier smiled kindly at her.

When she bent to pick up the pail of water to mop up the room in which he recovered, she saw that there was an emblem on his wrist, crossing his veins, one a sparrow bird, or so it looked, small and dapper, seated on a tattooed branch and calling sweetly, a mellow music that bathed him swaying in his sleep, humming some wild mountain tune of blackberry picking amongst sharp brambles in the wintertime, the music tossing his body as though in a trance, from one side to another s though he were lying in a hammock.

"To which group do you belong?" she asked him. "Or if it is better not to say, then do not tell me."

"It's not quite like that, lass," he shook his head. "Just like I can tell you're a fighter, a soldier from your gait, in the same way, you have found me out as a member of the passes wolves, also known as those who eat sparrows. But what I did not know was that in fact, I was not a wolf not a large, majestic animal, but a sparrow who longs to sing, at worst a mountain lynx, put in a trance, by the ministry of a singing fairy, whose notes are like the dawn of a morning on our cracking window sill?

She blushed. "I am no fairy if that was your intended meaning. But what do you wolves do, what makes you? Asked Najeeba curiously.

"We hunt birds, or rather helicopters, of the enemy, and shoot them down, and then raid their ammunition."

"Oh, so you kill people for a living? It is not just subliminal warfare? Indeed, I once saw a man with a necklace of all the bullets that had been removed from his body from the fighting. If that's not sad and deplorable indeed then what is?"

"You are correct. It is so, which I have realized better only after being injured. The only thing I didn't tell you, is that I long to sing of peace, to take part in negotiation, and to chart out a new nation by our commitment to prosperity, development and erudition and integrity. What if I told

you I am humbled of what I once was, someone who through ignorance tore things down when one day I would be built back up by one such as you and hardly deserve it?

"Don't say that."

"Would you forgive me then, allow me to join your ranks, share your tasks and your bunkers?"

"Tasks yes, bunkers no," said Najeeba taking a stern turn.

"Alright, point taken, but I want to learn your art of healing, of building people up, of bolstering them, of balming them."

"It takes a lot, more than you would think. And some talk, too."

"I'm sure it does, and I wish to improve my speech. If I had gone to Janaat, I'd have twenty dusky eyed maidens to look after my every whim, but here, where I live on earth, I have you. That is better than anything else. If only you knew."

"I know," said Najeeba, smiling.

He was of medium height, compactly built, but his frame had wasted in the days he'd gone a soldiering. Najeeba did not scorn him for his anger, understood he had had a right to it, but didn't want him, and neither did her medical team, for him to lose his life and take the lives of others' because of it.

(More on soldier's physicality, ontology, and Najeeba's thinking, epistemology)- ok, You did add that.

***

Monochromatic light, said Sheila, is light having a single wavelength, but on entering a prism, the refractive index of the glass splits the monochromatic ray into one of seven colours and 21 tones, a brilliant flash of rang.

This phenomenon, refraction, is defined as the change in direction of travel of light when it propagates itself obliquely from one transparent medium to another, such as glass to air or air to water.

The first two laws of refraction state that the incident ray, normal ray and refracted ray all lie on the same plane and the incident and reflected ray lie on opposite sides of the normal angle. The third law of refraction, Snell's law, states that sin i/sin r is constant for a given pair of media and is the refractive index for that pair. The sin is defined as the opposite side to the angle given, divided by the length of the hypotenuse.

The refractive index of a particular material is the extent or ability of that material to refract light. The refractive index of the second material with respect to the first medium, is the same as the speed of light in the first medium divided by the speed of light in the second medium.

We see various colours in the sky due to the phenomenon of scattering of light. This happens thus: when light travels through the atmosphere, it gets absorbed by the particles present in the atmosphere. These particles then move into a higher energy state and become partially transparent. Since higher energy states are less stable, the particles release the extra energy they have acquired in all possible directions and this process is known as the scattering of light.

At sunset, the sun's light reaches us obliquely, passing through a thicker layer of atmosphere than when the sun is directly ahead of us at noon. Thus, the rays are of a lower energy level when they reach us, appearing red, which is at a lower energy level than blue, which we see during the day. Travelling through a thicker layer of particles and air, all the blue light of a higher frequency of wave oscillation has been scattered away at sunset.

This is the story of the ragged red you see at dusk, which looks almost like a rose cast by the wayside and withering …

"I must be true," Sheila said once, "To the words the Lord puts in my mouth to be said. There are times when I have a choice, and there are other times when he calls the words, bids them to be spoken unaltered and unadulterated by myself, the speaker. And there are times when I prefer to keep quiet and to let God show people what he wants them to see, what he wants to be seen."

***

A memory. "I only ever wanted to be your comrade, friend, fellow voyager." Sheila said weeping.

"You are like my little sister," said Avan. "Remember me," she said, "When I am married." She hoped and hoped for the violence to be over now that she was giving herself away.

Despite Sheila's sorrow at Avan's leaving, she was thrilled. She now belonged to two bands: one a Kurdish Nomadic troupe, and the other, her own clan with scattered origins. At the wedding Sheila threw rice at Avan's mirror but was too shy to sing.

She saw Avan's face in the reflection, surrounded by Khalas (aunts), and saw a tear streaking down her rough hewn cheek, a cheek that was already weathered with years, suns and summers, reddened by childhood fun, sculpted by work. Her spirit was beaten into shape on an anvil of character forged upon the hot coals of spartan living; of spare meals and dragging goats into a makeshift pen to milk them with pretty chapped dugs or hands; and Sheila would remember this always, always would remember. A bride leaving her parents' home was a cause for wailing despite the new happy beginnings; for although her husband was a sweet man, caring and compassionate as could be, now she would have to make her way around strangers and would not see her family again for years upon years.

Sheila's eyes followed the path of the old clothes peddling woman with the pack on her veiled head, calling in a melodious voice, "Stainless steel for old clothes," turning her head this way and that and cupping her hands around her mouth to amplify her voice.

They had bought so many new vessels for the new couple, had surrendered their old chaderis, and in return, for Avan did not like to take gifts, had pledged three new carpets and two chaderis which she would weave for the likes of them and their houses.

The design on the first one was thus: it was a bright new one, with a silver river snaking down the middle, like a crack down a mirror, flamingos nesting in the mudflats, wheat grain growing in sheaves on either sides of the banks, the trees letting loose shuddering autumn leaves, fall tresses of gold to be carried away by the winter wind that blew nary so hard in the branches of the apple orchards.

When Sheila saw the sketch she commented to Yasinia, "Allah's bounties are apparent in the tapestries of his believers, for they ever have remembrance of him in their worship, which is work."

The drought time was upon them, and with the artesian well dried up, they had to travel/walk miles to the banks of the only stream in the province it seemed, across copses of arid furze and rustling acacia and cypress, to fill their buckets with water, two attached to a pole slung across their strong shoulders, and casting from side to side, walking steadily so the water would not slop out. Their limbs, or whatever was not covered by their loose dresses, burned, almost roasted in the sun, and they took the wooded routes precisely because the sunlight at that time of noon was so fierce when the sun was at its zenith.

'I wonder what it's like for my friend, Avan, around all those new people," Sheila petitioned Yasinia for her opinion.

"I was already brought to a house of strangers, and had to make them my own, that is why I never married, as I couldn't stand to separate myself and adjust again," Yasinia replied covertly. "Although I hope it is different for you."

"I suppose everyone has to do it once in their lives but twice is more than necessary," Sheila said.

"Exactly," Yasinia agreed.

They walked in silence. “Indeed,” said Sheila. “The tapestries she weaves are so beautiful I could just look and look at them.”

“Indeed,” said Yasinia. “Everyone must find their talent and then develop it, as that is the behest, the desire the will of God, whether that be farming, weaving, cooking, teaching, writing. And of course, we’ve got to use those chaderis, so it would only do if we could stand to look at them. But don’t you think the singular talent is too much to valourize? It should be with a variety of activities that one honours God, and serves one’s community and family and the rest of humanity.

“I agree,” said Sheila. “When anything crafted by the hand is useful to us, they begin to be comely in our eyes.”

“I prefer that way of thinking,” said Yasinia. “Would that men thought that way. Indeed, our men do, they get so attached to their wives when their wives are in their service, that they can’t stand to see them go anywhere else other than home.”

“And that’s a problem. In nothing be too good, lest you invite the evil eye,” said Sheila carefully. “Or rather, if you must be excellent at your work, spit on the ground three times in the morning and always thank Allah for all things.”

“It’s interesting,” said Yasinia, “To think how every thing, even the scenery we walk through, is connected, in some tenuous way to ourselves, how the turning of a leaf elicits the turning of a head, and how the rising dust obscures the road but makes us know who we are, consolidates us in ourselves, and how we are agents in the divine plan.”

“Indeed, I know what my plan is,” said Sheila.

“What?” said Yasinia.

“To become a teacher, so that girls don’t end up having to leave home for a husband.”

“That’s a long shot, but a good idea. We need to think, how you will do that.”

“Indeed, let’s sit to the side of the road a bit, to discuss it. We can get the water sooner or later, it will wait for us.”

“You’ll have to go to a better school if you want to be a teacher. Or at least, will have to qualify for college.”

“I’m taking the board exam this March.”

“We’ll have to think, how we will pay for you to go to college. I have some money saved over in the tin chest from when I was a maid in Kabul, the only time I left home when I was young,” said Yasinia.

“Oh, we don’t have to use that,” said Sheila. “I can sew more.”

“But how will you study?”

And so she had gone. She had studied hard for the exams, Yasinia doing the cooking, Aref taking the sheep out to pasture, but sometimes Sheila with her study books, sitting on a stone and navigating the physics with her finger and a pencil, in the open sun streaming down at the warehouse of grazing cattle, to copy out passages and do sums in her thin yellowed notebook. And it had been worth it, because she was accepted in the first merit list to the Kihaan college in Kabul near to the family where Yasinia had worked in her youth, and so Yasinia’s several city friends lived in the area, khalas for Sheila. And she had found friends among her fellow students, who would all help one another with lessons that some did not understand. She met girls there who shared her love of learning, who read books, who applied theory to life, but also life to theory. Later, she would tell Yasinia, I was just remembering my friends from college and how much I picked up from them, and it’s all because of you, dear sister, who raised me to want to learn. And she would remember Ayaz

always, Avan who cooked with her, who walked with her to pasture, who shared her notes on weaving and cooking, and regretted there was not even a proper address through which they could exchange letters. And threw herself into her studies so that she would become someone who someday, even if through the subliminal teachings of the mind in the lives of children, could make her country less remote to its own people.

Do a more layered telling. Incorporate reflexivity, even as you're using a juvenile tone.

Memories Unspoken

"Like them?" asked Sheila, always eager to share her aesthetic talents in sewing, patching and weaving.

"Yes, I do," said Shakeela who had just arrived, holding it up to her collarbones. "It will make a good thickness in our blanket layers when we sleep. I thank you, child, for your needlework.

"And in the day, I shall hang it in the doorway of my tent, to keep out the cold air, the snatch of the winter, that draw of breath, that freezes the fire, the fingers and toes, and sets ice in the bags of ration."

"But the cold is our grandfather, so we must not forget to honour him. He brings redness to our cheeks, strength to our gait and terrible beauty to our land. We with our tales around the fire of his valorous spirit, honour him, he the djinn of bad weather, his invisible deeds and his truthfulness, the way he always quenches people's thirst, for he is the same as the lord of the water. He calls rain forth from his tears or his drenching pail, drumming upon the parched earth like claws, in flashfloods and thunderstorms, and whose gifts we save in our canals and tanks, the reflective pools that wheedle our rice to grow and thrive. ."

Speech was free; anyone could speak to anyone, whether one belonged to this tribe or that. As long as one had something to say, one could say it. Factions had not yet torn the country, devastated it from a land of grapes, winds, red laterite and sunshine to one of shells, mortars and broken walls, of whispered meanings floating hither and thither like gusts that could scarce be spoken, the fear of vengeances.

"Go well and take care, Khala," said Sheila to the hill woman Shakeela, wrapping her about in the quilt like a shawl.

"Do return if you need anything or are in the mood for storytelling," said Yasinia.

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"See!" Sheila screamed, delirious. "Do you know why they bleed? Because they are human beings! Do you know why they sell opium? So that they can feed their bellies. And so that others can alleviate the pain and guilt of having caused danger to them. Do you know why I bleed? So that I can make another of them for whomsoever has fallen, I can create one more man, one more woman, one more child."

Sheila had witnessed the explosion and its consequences on her village folk, after having given water from their nearly dry Artesian well to a set of American soldiers, and they had come to see the sight.

"Indeed," said Yasinia. "She speaks the truth. Where there are imbalances in your society, they arise partially because of the injustices you foist on ours. When there happen anomalies in yours, they happen partially because of the great inequalities between your society and ours."

The young commander hung his head. "What shall I do, ignore orders from my higher ups, then?"

"Yes," said Yasinia. "If that's what it takes to bring peace to our region. You do not even have to worry about your position once you return to the States – what kind of life could you live there with all this guilt haunting you?"

"Stay here and make amends, teach in a school, open a business, become a diplomat negotiating peace between your nation and ours, and then make our nation yours. You may alleviate some of your punishment that is sure to come, otherwise, if you do. For harming people, just as birds, is wrong, when they have no other defence than their flight and their song. Unless you want to become entangled in their claws and beaks, their memories and rhetoric as enemies, which would lead to another kind of imprisonment altogether.

"I will do as you say," said the American soldier. "Never again, never again, shall I raise shell in violence on your homeland again. But may I be honoured for it."

"Honour may come, as and when it is deserved," said Yasinia.

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The ragpicker lady, who roams the streets in search of waste to assemble and sell to the scrap dealer. Sheila and Yasinia observed her after having spoken to her briefly. "Indeed, you'd better observe how she acts at chaikhanas for she's a woman among men. See how she holds her own, how she asks for tea which she pays for herself, how she sits with them, laughs with them. For one day, God forbid, you may have to work around men."

The boy she liked in college, who dormed on the opposite side of the campus, was Hazara, but unlike many of them, had very dark eyes and hair and skin the colour of summer melons and bark. Next to him she was brown hazelnut, sequoia wood when tanned, and they often talked of labour unions in India and Pakistan, and how, if they were to bring factories to the country, it would have to be with unions too, or it would be incomplete. He was studying hospital administration, and often had to go on internships to test out his skills and knowledge acquired.

The matter of his study was, how patients were treated by doctors, their submergence of their awareness into the medical vocabulary and terminology, how they related their illnesses to their own lives with their corresponding unfreedoms and deprivations, the patients' ease of travelling to the healthcare unit, which was usually very hard, their fluency with the medical vocabulary and communication of preventive care from doctors to patients, was all part of what he had to oversee. Most patients came from very poor backgrounds, and the hospital was their last hope. Yusuf tried to make them see true hope, the kind of visions that could cure them instantly, put them on the path of healing.

"Think of what you'd do if you were well." He said, "And practice it in your inner eye. Esperanza. Spirited." The problem was so many of them were casualties of bombs, that hope was often very hard, very difficult to engage with. And even if they were healed, there were so many others wheeled in with the similar cause of injury. He was glad Sheila was in the field of education, for that, according to him was the only way to keep youth from becoming militant, to occupy them with learning about the world which they would then understand well enough to master with work and with knowledge.

A brave leaping, Nimble Deer weeping, for he knows redemption has to be collective if it is true.

The Pashtun and Hazara, Tajik, and Brahui, Uzbek and Gujjar, and Kyrgyz and Nuristani must all get along and there must be equality among them. And people must cultivate themselves, not allow eachother's energies to be dissipated by war, unless that was jihad al nafs, or war with one's own soul, which comes from reprehending desire and fostering self-discipline and accomplishment.

For cultivation leads to life coming full circle, for knowledge to be passed on to the next generation and the self or the soul to be salvaged.

"People should be able to write about seasons in an eternal fashion, without worrying that this one will be their last," said Yusuf. "How the mildew rankens the pond in the summer and the slush becomes reflective. How the millweed covers its surface, trellising this way and that like bridges. The sweet smell of algae clogging the waters, which shine in the passing of the sun over its bowl."

"The fall of leaves, the needles and fall in a carpet caught by moss on the rocks."

"Or the golden flame appearance of the trees in autumn, their mellow scent like fresh apple fruit, ready to be made into pies, flavoured bread, or consumed raw, hard and full of sap."

The sound of capitalism, of construction workers screaming over the noise, forced into this line of work by necessity, by the fact of no other options for them. It made her angry, it did, this forced consignment of their strength and ability to heights, this day in and day out showing up of labour, showing down of the people below. These wretched of the earth, these disinherited, whose only recourse was the sky work, building houses in thin air, within which they could never afford to live in themselves, but cost more than twenty times a month's wages for them.

So, mixing cement in a mist of its dust, far better or less dangerous than the heights job, pouring in water so that the scaffolding workers can dabble it on the bricks insulating them. When they don't even wear hard hats themselves, they cover the bare bones of the building.

Why not welfarism? Corporations made so much that they had enough to pay more taxes, to send workers for higher skill training, to allow them to build themselves up and grow.

Sheila thought these things as she rode the bus back to her village, where she would begin teaching them from next week. She had already prepared the lessons for three grades, and had only to review them a fourth time in her mind, and then she would be ready to give them, recite them, teach.

"Indeed," Yousuf said. "There should be peace and calm, equality enough so that people can quietly enjoy their natural surroundings in which they work."

"If the lord says you must marry, then for God's sake marry only one," said Yasinia. 'You can be friends with others, but your sovereignty must be to yourself and your one partner and the life you seek to create with them. But please concentrate more on studies than anything else, for that is what we're praying and hoping and paying for you to do. We wish that you will become a good teacher and get posted somewhere in a remote village and teach there to change and improve things.

As someone who has been given the opportunity to follow her intellect where it would lead her, it is partly your job to attempt to lift people's lives from those of abject drudgery, to the leisure of rationality, of speculation, not idle; but productive, to give them more choices from which to make decisions.

If your calling is teaching, then you must put as much into it as you can. Paraphrase all the stories and poems so that your children understand them. Underline every hard word and use a dictionary to translate it into their languages. Highlight difficult phrases and ask them what they mean, and if they don't know, give them an answer in a line or two. Know yourself, what the moral of the story is, the political or ethical message or truths it brings out, what the author was trying to say.

And then, tell them a little about what you think. Know also that children have a lot of knowledge, and it has merely, as Socrates did, to be drawn out of them and tapped from where it is stored up.

He said: "Do not train a child to learn by force or harshness, but direct them to what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each."

Because we are all born with talents, and the most important thing is to discover our strengths and to follow and develop them.

Teach them that we are all related, and that everyone is important and has something to share in this world, and that finding one's talents and developing them, reaching one's potential and pouring it into the services of others is of utmost importance.

Teach them how to add, subtract and divide, the rules of algebra, the laws of chemistry and of the atom, the laws of motion and simple mechanics, the behaviour of levers and simple machines. Teach them the importance of hard work and perseverance.

And teach them, not only about numbers and facts, and languages, but also that everything has a spirit that must be respected and nourished and cherished, even if it is a tree with pretty wood you would use in carvings. Use fallen dead, not living trees for that.

And never commit the sin of pride, the idea that you are better than other women or men. Do not try to gather more for yourself than you are allotted for the moment you leave the hand of your heavenly father to do this, you may slip and find yourself forsaken."

Sheila smiled and said to Yasinia, "thou sayest, "Be like a child, picking blackberries and blueberries, with your right hand, while your left hand holds fast to the hands of his earthly father."

"Indeed, you remember well. Be grateful for what you have, for what you are given. Be grateful to Him, to your sister, your brother, to your teachers, for your learning, your health, be grateful to farmers and fowlers for your dinner, to your students for giving you the opportunity to teach. Be at service in all things. And never exploit anyone who does you a service. Remember that Tire and Sidon were destroyed in a day because they committed violence in their trade, and that Sir Galahad was able to say: "I have the strength of ten men, because my heart is pure." And above all, do not think yourself too good or too godly, that you are as wise as Daniel, that you know all the secrets of the lord, for that again would be self exaltation. Rather let God bless you, after you exalt the Lord, the creator and disposer of all things.

Every blessing is a test, and every test is a blessing. In every meeting with God and his Angels, every rung of the ladder at which we are given to sip lutuf, the pearl-milk sweet drink, flavoured with tamarind, rose essence and fragrance, is a chance to slip down the ladder, addicted to stay on one longer than is expected of us, or to climb to the next rung, where we can meet the next manifestation of God, in our evolved Avatar. Blessed be those who use their food to grow and be enlightened.

This road seems like a tightrope, I know, but indeed it is not. It is the only road that exists, and it is the most fascinating and rewarding and self-perpetuating one.

Remember when Zara Ma'am said that the ideal world of forms is more real than the everyday mundane world where we must make choices and decisions? Believing this allows us to live with ideals, principles in mind, rather than living on the surface, where things are not really what they seem, or where things as they seem in their duality are not the truth, which is love, and one must strive to live in line with the truth."

The buttercups and daisies at the sides of the tracks began to blurr, as the wheels began to rattle against the stones. Yasinia, who was like a mother to Sheila, laughed hysterically, and tears flowed down Sheila's stinging cheeks as Yasinia's shape grew smaller and smaller. Sheila saw Yasinia's veil flying as she chased the running train to get in her last words. "Follow it, follow it!"

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Imtiaz writes to Najeeba,

"There is no view, no sight wasted in you,

The curling twigs in a kiwis or a crow's nest,

Fashioned into one house upon the crossroads of the world.

All is consolidated by someone,

And all is a conversation with others.

The sun on the window sill,

Stand still and ponder for a while.

The diamond light on the river flashes,

When you are on the banks,
The rushes of wheat swaying and toppling
In the wind, a lion's mane of gold
The sweep and drape of a woman's veil
Cascading down like a waterfall,
Twisting and unfurling like an egret's
Spread, outstretched wingspan,
Feathers displayed like a fan, or like a posse of knives.

Walking with someone means talking with them,
Even if that person is God.
Behold, she has seen his face
She has seen the pearls of his teeth,
The sparrow flocks of his eyes
The barns of his beard
And the glens of his forehead.
She lived in his time
She ate with him and dunked bread
In milk and water with him,
She washed his feet with her hair
And perfumed them with myrrh.

Rose perfumed air and twisting
Puffs of cloud, and peonies
Raising their pollen, gesture like, on the wind.
The wrapping clouds melting,
Dissolving their cumulus ice,
Into arrows of rain that pierce
the flowers, Hail that rattles
the stems and chokes the heavens.
Wind, keening, whispering,
Playing in the lyre left at the arched window,
Warbling sweet tunes, the music of the worlds,
Disturbing the strings, Like brushstrokes

on the eaves of an easel,

Plied and swished into strange things.

I called you because something told me to.

Something in me called out to you.

Your kindness is rewarded, see now,

How the universe is sequestered in our minds?

How love surges like a wind through

the curtains of forests behind our eyes,

How possibility rises, how we dance

With the intoxication of the swaying trees

that let loose their treasure house of autumn?

The liquorice smell of the fallen leaves,

like a candied apple, or a rotting pear, ripe

with the mellowness of past springs?

It is for that reason that I have called you,

To share rapture, to make delight and to praise

The one who called us both forth from the cave of ignorance,

To praise him and know his glory,

And to find one another among the bivouac of the storm,

The drapes of green hills and ever unfolding rivers."

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"O traveller! Your Dua has been heard. Pull over by the wayside and offer the obligatory prayers.

"Not only prayer, but work also is God's due. Prepare your notes for your days of instruction."

Understanding and compassion are as important as erudition, sit by the room a little on the floor and think."

"My grandmother is confined," said Sarai to Sheila quietly. "So she sits on the bed to tell me stories."

"And do you listen well? As ked Sheila.

"Indeed I do," said Sarai. "And I read my schoolwork to her as also."

"Is she proud?"

"She is, but she says I need to learn other skills, such as cooking well, cleaning and mending clothes in the house, just as my brother Altaf always helps Papa with the repairs on the doors, roof and windows. "

"I suppose that your grandmother needs all the support she can get, such as help practicing walking, and related exercises, massaging of her feet, keeping water in a jug by her bedside, chatting and bringing her a kangha to comb her hair with in the morning."

"Yes, and when we give her food, she is sometimes not hungry. But when she is, even though it is not a mealtime for the rest of us, we all eat at different times, we give her food."

"Good. And always, always, be there for her, speaking, reading, cheering. She is one to whom you owe your life and your happiness and you should recompense her for that fact."

Shall I read you the translation of the story Heidi goes home?" Sheila asked the children.

"Yes," they said.

'Looks like I shall translate it for you. Heidi, a country girl, after her education in the city, goes back to the alps to become a schoolteacher. And she and the goatherd Peter take in an orphan boy, who is dejected and miserable, and who is rejected by the rest of society, his name is Chel. They try to integrate him with other children his age. He is an artist and lives in a hill cave, and tears up his notebook to paint, and he gets his colours from the flowers of the mountainside, and that's why his paintings, made from oxidising organic hues, are so strange in bent. But before he begins painting, he is naughty indeed at school. He trips people and pulls their hair and says nasty things to them.

Heidi and Peter sit with this boy and go through his paintings, interpreting them, trying to understand the boy through the lines he makes, the profusion of colours he brings to the sketches, the wild blue that surrounds the flowers, as though it were a balm that the sky, ever empty but generous except for the posse of clouds, brings to the pain of the lonely flowers, gazing and gazing at the sun form the open hillside.

But instead of being a balm, the blue underlines their loneliness, their desolation.

But Chel is changed. After a week of painting, he no longer pulls people's hair or trips them up or calls people names. He is quiet and attentive, speaking to nobody but listening intently. One day at school, he speaks for the first time.

"Sara, may I please borrow your notebook? I need to copy the lesson form Monday that I missed.

Sara gives it to him, surprised by his strange change of behaviour and the eagerness of his voice.

And what would you know? He copies the lesson carefully, and returns it to her with many thanks, a tentative smile, in mint condition. He puts a sprig of buttercups, on the cover for the scent.

So happy was Sara to think of the changed Chel, she says to him, "Chel, come to join us at play."

He looks up, suspicious. Slowly, timidly he steps and takes his place among his fellow peers, his face down and reddening with embarrassment, but his feet stepping in line with the hopscotch. He knows he has been bad. Slowly but surely, slowly, he raises his face to the streaming rays of the sun.

He looks at them. He knows he is less fortunate than them, and he could cherish and nourish his hurt forever. But like all children, God has given him a gift to cope with all that, to distract him from his losses, to use and channel his pain into a road of productivity, of beauty of communication of nature's wonders. He can paint. He can even do so for a living. He can express the innermost longings of the soul through colours and lines, couldn't it even be that he salve the aches of his own deprivation through his sketches, through his careful strokes, through the shining of the lines and their coherence in the morning? He can make a living and find a family that would be with him always, to support and cherish. He could paint for a living, though he has found work in a hogs-shed. He will relate to them man to man.

He has even helped Peter in the construction of a new chalet. Peter and Heidi consider him to be their little brother, their friend in solidarity, concern, empathy, listening to his woes when they rise up and attack him. They bolster him in his loneliness and desolation, the absence of his parents, and guiding him in his profession. They lead him out of the bog of pessimism and doubt, like a barn that raises itself straight out of its flat laying on the gound.

And for the first time, he plays with the other children, leaving behind, for a small while, his bitterness.

'Did I tell you the story of the little goat in Kazakhstan that got sick?" Yasinia asked Sheila.

"I don't think so," said Sheila. "Tell it to me."

"I call it, A Tussle for Livestock."

"Shekl was pulling burrs and thorns out of her stockings and skirts, for the grass she'd had to walk through was full of them. When she walked across the steppe with her goats, she made a tiny tunnel through the weeds and brambles and grasses, a flat path along which her trusting goats followed.

But Shekl was worried about her girl goat Alyona, for the animal had grown listless and weak, hobbling along to keep up with the rest of the flock. She felt her in her arms and knew that it was a fever that could quickly spread to the others. Shekl knew that she had grown up on their milk and what her family had bought from it, and in return, it was only fair that she cared for them when they were sick.

The goatherd was so tired and discouraged she felt like breaking down in the middle of her path, stopping, halting and sitting among the rushes, her head between her knees, sobbing, for she loved the goats with her own life. Instead, she stood in the middle of the steppe, her arms draped along her sides, her head tilted to look up at the sky, her hair flowing down behind her back, and asked what she should do now, how she should cope with the situation that had grown up on her capable hands.

She sat down, patting the grass beneath her flat, and looking up at the welkin for succour. The blue sky's dome that had been her home when she was grazing and tending her flock would have to be her roof at night. In a flash, it came to her … she would sell the embroidered upholstery of her tent, which her mother had created – where was she now? leave its poles in the ground and sleep under the sky that summer. The money she received in return would go a long way for her travel to a vet and medicine, and perhaps Alyona, and one of her only companions in the world, would live.

Shekl looked down at the piece of paper, on which she had written a poem the previous day in a flood of happiness.

"A spindle of hay, dawning,

A sprig of chestnut, brawning,

A posse of vessels tinkling

With water from the stream sprinkling,

Uncut grass growing long

Long along the sides of my tent

Daisies and buttercups strew

The spangling sheaves of wheat

And unharvested wild bulrushes

Lazing down the banks of the stream."

She recited the poem to Alyona, hoping it would cure her. But she wasn't taking any chances. She headed homewards with the flock, so that she would reach before sundown (they had already eaten their fill) and make ready for the next morning. No sooner had she set foot in the tent that she began to unravel the upholstery, unbinding it from the poles, rolling it up and bundling it into packets, tied closed and snug with string.

The carpets were embroidered with abstract shapes, azure, amber, arrows and minarets, spirals, arabesques and domes. They would make good merchandise, she knew, in the market. She was possessed suddenly of a feeling that she had what others wanted, but could not help being eager to give it away.

For she was a true herder, and her heart lay in the well-being of her flock.

The next morning, Shekl headed out at first light with Alyona in her arms, to the nearest town, clothed for anonymity in a brown veil for she did not wish, in the clamour of the market place, in her anxiety, to be known.

As she was walking, she spied a blonde woman, making her way towards the place where soup and kebabs were sold, a foreign woman who wore no veil.

"Is there a reason why you're holding your goat in your arms?" she asked Shekl in Persian.

At first Shekl did not want to answer her. She kept walking, and tried to ignore the woman, for a moment, only a moment. Then something in her made her speak.

"My dear lady, my goat is sick. I only pray Allah to heal her. She needs medicine."

The woman was nodding.

"My carpets. Will you buy my carpets, so she can get well?"

The woman had enough money. She liked the carpets, Shekl could see. She was also worried for her.

"Remember," said Shekl. "This carpet was made by my mother. When my goat is well, I will come to buy them back from you. Enjoy them for a little while, learn from their shapes colours, their lore, their grain how they were woven. Because I shall soon buy them back from you, and give you milk based sweets, for bailing me out when I was in need."

The woman's face fell. She said, "Your carpets are precious. Please keep them. I don't wish to take them from you, for any sum of money, however small. Perhaps you have something else to sell … do you have anything else to offer in exchange?"

"I shall give you my cheese?" For she had a block of cheese, fresh-made at her side.

"I'll buy your cheese," said the woman. Shekl's heart warmed towards her, as did Alyona's.

"For certainty," she said, and gave her the cheese for five thousand tTenges.

"When you meet again, I think your goat will be a nanny with kids of her own," said the bystanders, as Shekl and the woman parted.

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She blamed the country, she blamed the government for its poor coverage of the countryside with its healthcare system. Indeed, she'd had to rely on the kindness of a foreigner to buy her merchandise just to be able to pay for a vet. But now there were many other people she had to thank; those who had pointed her in the direction of a doctor, those who had told her the bus routes, those who had given her water to wash for prayers and for her and the goat to drink.

Indeed, she had decided, rather than relying totally on God, she would rely on her own resources, those He had planted deep within her and which now, in her early adulthood, were bearing fruit. "This kid," she found herself saying to the doctor, has been warm since yesterday, a high fever."

"Let me see," said the vet. "Yes, yes indeed."

"What do I do? What medicine do I give her?" asked Shekl. "Our goats are our wealth, our treasure, doctor. We can't stand by and see just anything happen."

"I understand," he said. 'I suspect if I give her a shot of antibiotic, her fever may come down, her infection disappear."

"Then do that, then do that. How much do I pay you?"

"You have come from Aqtobe to Alma Ata?"

"Yes."

"I'll not make you pay," said the doctor. "You have come from too far, on resources too straightened I can see."

Shekl thanked the doctor profusely saying, "As you know, goats are our livelihood, I would be willing to pay what I have for her to get well."

"Alright, for your dignity I'll take three hundred Tenges."

"You're kind, doctor. I'll pay five thousand for other poor patients who cannot pay," said Shekl.

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The woman hoped the kid and the girl were well. She was leaving Kazhakhstan that day. She had a vague feeling that whatever she had done would bear no fruit, that her having paid five thousand Afghani, a currency technically only valid across the border, for a side of cheese would make little difference to life of the little scarecrow she had seen, just as she had seen many others like them.

But when she thought that, she severely underestimated the power of pride and grit, the power of pity, compassion and generosity. For the money she paid went a long way -- the doctor used the money to buy medicine for the animals of the poor patients who came to him: a donkey, a cow, a hen and a foal, and they were all cured. The doctor was inspired by the poor peasant's generosity to sponsor a ward for other struggling patients, to undercut the scarcity of medical care for poor livestock in the nation. As for Alyona, Shekl's goat, she was alright within two days, in the future of two years to give birth to four kids, scampering on her hindlegs behind her mistress, hurrying along so she didn't get left behind.

"This story illustrates how one person's concern and generosity can go a long way, inspiring others to do their bit. The rich within nations must step in to help the poor, and the rich, industrialized countries must seek to provide for those nations that are less well off than itself. In some way, you who have more must become the ones sent, to bring prosperity to those who have less, and those who have less must become the ones ordained to bring to the well off the spiritual riches that they possess, because everyone, everyone is blessed in one way or another.

Day 1. Dals, Intercropping, mixed farming, terracing, preventers of soil erosion

Intercropping: when 2 crops are grown alongside each-other, in alternating furrows. Usually, crops are chosen so as to by biologically compatible or symbiotic, for example, growing dals or lentils alongside rice or wheat. Lentils possess nitrogen fixing bacteria in their rhizome nodules, which enables them to draw nitrogen from the atmosphere and Nitrates from rain and soil, turning them into proteins or urea, which then can be up-taken by the roots of rice and wheat plants, who also require nitrogen, but are unable to fix it the same way lentil rhizomes do.

Mixed farming: the practice of keeping several or multiple livelihood options running on one's farm, such as animal husbandry of cows, goats, sheep and hens, as well as the cultivation or growth of rice, wheat and lentils. The livestock are reared for their milk, meat and wool, and the crops for home and market consumption.

Terracing: When agriculture is practiced on a hill or mountain, and the slope is carved into rings each of a particular level or steps. It is practiced in Tibet Ladakh area, as well as North Eastern Indian states such as Meghalaya, Nepal, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland, etc. Watering occurs through rainfall, sometimes, water must be brought in buckets by farmers who climb the mountain face, which is a backbreaking task. Setting up pipelines with pumps is now being done; this is one reason why water consumption is energy intensive and the tourist lodges consume gallons and gallons of hot water, while the impoverished local people have scarcely enough water to irrigate their fields with. On the other hand, tourism does generate valuable revenue for the region, but it could be argued that most of this ends up going to hoteliers, who provide some minimal numbers of jobs to local people. (add how terraces are constructed)

Root bridges: When a tree system of two Banyan trees is used along with its roots, each on either side of the channel of a river, to grow across the channel and meet, interlocking and intertwining to form a functional bridge which can be walked across.

Preventers of soil erosion: Broom grass is grown on sandy soil to prevent soil erosion. It forms an extensive and meshing, linking root system, which fastens the soil particles and section well into place and is thus popular as a tool to grow on slopes and prevent landslides and on the margins of farms. It multiplies quickly and spreads across the soil rapidly, without human beings offering it extra care or protection.

A day from Sheila's schoolroom blackboard, among Safia, Safina, Razia, Batul and the other girls, which she taught in flashforwards:

Lesson 1. Vikram's Garden in the Rain

Vikram ran out of the door of his house to survey his father's fields, where they were growing paddy, and the small garden where they were growing vegetables, such as cabbages and tomatoes, carrots, coriander, bel-pepper and mushrooms, and a few varieties of fruits, such as water melons, and a jamun tree.

Vikram remembered how they had grown the mushrooms initially. They had spread the kitchen garbage, the refuse from cooking their meals, such as potato peelings, bean clippings, and whatever food that had spoiled and couldn't be eaten, the leaves and stems of cauliflowers, which they separated from the vegetable when they chopped it up for cooking. The mushrooms soon took root upon the garbage, and converted the unusable refuse into edible vegetable, which they were glad to sell and eat.

There had been a heavy storm the day before and Vikram's father was worried it had damaged some of their crops. Thus he had sent his son to check on the fields. Yesterday, the storm had been so fierce that they had scarce been able to step out, for being blown away and the rain and wind had nearly blown the thatched roof off over their heads, almost robbing them of the shelter they had. They were glad they had built brick walls the year before or their old mud house would have just dissolved in the rain.

Vikram ran to the cabbages. The melon crops on their way to ripening, had their creeping vines twisted and pale, instead of green, as the ground had grown waterlogged, and they were nearly torn and choked with moisture. He sprinkled sand onto their roots, from the bowl in which they kept dry sand in their house, hoping it would absorb the moisture and would allow the roots of the melon plant to be healthy again.

He examined the cabbages. They had tiny white grubs growing, inching across the outer leaves. They would eat or bore holes in the cabbages and destroy them if he did not act quickly. Yet he did not want to harm the cater-pillars. So he searched out some weeds growing nearby, which he and his father had not yet managed to uproot or pull out from the garden, and gently placed the tiny caterpillar grubs on the weeds' leaves and stems. The caterpillars could eat the weed foliage and grow and form their chrysalis and become butterflies there, and the weeds would not be allowed to take over the garden.

Vikram had found a win-win solution with the creatures of his family's vegetable plot and was glad.

q.1. Why did Vikram run into his father's garden from his house?

2. What did they grow in the garden?

3. What had happened to the plants in the garden because of the storm?

4. What did Vikram do with the soil of the melon-crop, and why?

5. What did Vikram do with the caterpillars on the cabbages, and how was this a win-win solution?

Glossary:

Survey: a detailed search and observation of a piece of land or of a group of people.

Initially: in the beginning

Refuse- garbage

Spoiled- rotten, ruined, inedible

Took root- began growing in

Converted- turned into

Fierce- angry, harsh

Robbing- thieving

Shelter- housing

Dissolved- disintegrated

Creeping- growing slowly close to the ground

Twisted- growing crookedly

Sprinkled- applied lightly

Grubs- baby caterpillars just hatched from eggs

Win-win solution- a solution to a problem that is good for everybody

Foliage- leaves

Chrysalis- cocoon

Takeover- dominate

A splashing, nosing river dolphin,

Give some examples of things Shekl tells the rich, spiritual sayings. Rumi, and quotes from Miriam's speakers. "A poem I imagine of the sea." said Sheila. (Which she had never seen).

"The slipping of the moon,

Over the distant sea.

The casting of its silver net

Over the waves of the river.

In order to escape the net

To stay out of the snares of the hunter,

Practice lovingkindness to

Pray for the perpetrator of cruelty.

For many eels and many fires

Will circumscribe and encompass the one who strays without repentance

But become not like your enemy

In adopting his methods.

I rode many boats at high tide

I steered many a helm on water

But I learned one thing, that man and woman

Must live by the tides of their own blood.

Must learn the tricks and words of their own trade, and find one,

And make fortune with his very cunning.

To love is to wish life to one's beloved

To cherish is to care for the wishes of one's beloved

To know is to act in a concrete way

Planning the boards to form the surface of a table

At which one's family is to eat.

And he who does not provide for his family,

Is worse than an unbeliever.

Thus I said, if it is disallowed to work outside the home,

For fear of being against the law as a woman,

Most women would choose to be believers

And brave the religious police.

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Chapter 8. The Aftermath

The curving boughs of an olive tree, leaves outlined against the sunset in gold. Fruits and seeds dripping from it like grapes or planets gathered on rings around a central star, in an orbit or a cornucopia, laden, scattering, bountiful, a horn of plenty, of gathering and letting go. Wheels of seed and grass turning, whorling, growing up against the tree an olive tree, leaves outlined against the sunset in bold. The wheel barrow of seasons, pressing them forward, the kind arms of mother time who held them graciously because they strove for the truth and were righteous, in her stately arms.

The woman was standing in the doorway, hanging up the washing outside. The slant of sunlight hit the floor at her feet and the scarves and shawls strained in the wind, stirring, rustling, quivering, their fringes quivering and letting themselves loose on the slipstream. Her arms, serpentine reached for the chords upon which she hung the clothes. Her feet gripped the dirt floor, seizing at the dust.

"Come, come, sit." The woman, who was called Yasinia called. "You must understand that everything around us is related, and that human beings are part of nature, and that the bird's eggs are the greatest jewel of the creator's hands. So, everything that we eat, use or work upon is our relation, our relative, which we cannot entirely divide or sunder from ourselves, our innermost being, our consciousness, our knowledge.

The zahir, that which is obvious, is the appearance that occurs in everyday life, whereas the batin is the true relationship between these things that we use, and their inner characteristics and the way they all connect, relate and have some commerce or exchange, flow of inner, hidden qualities.

For example, to a child, the speech between merchants that procures a good from producer to market place, or marketplace to consumer, is the batin, the (hidden mystery) whereas the actual experience of consumption or taste, is the zahir, the obvious. But the taste could also be a batin in the case that it reminds the child of its cousins and the thrill they had playing together when they last prepared this item together in a pair or group. In this case, it is the commodity's use value that could be the zahir the obvious property, and the relations of production that lead to its generation, that are the batin, the unseen. Or, the value of energy or calorific metabolic value the child gets from eating the food is also a batin, because it is difficult to quantify but not to observe.

You can't entirely apply the rules of Marxism to Islam, however. It is sometimes the things which we cannot quite explain, like kinship, that we find most compelling. But in a way, because Marxism attempts to care for all citizens in a country, irrespective of their social class, or attempts to erase the distinction of class, it is an application of universal justice to economy. It gives an intrinsic value to work, and the experience and process and individuals who drive production, which under capitalism are only valued in terms of their producing use value or market value.

Ahmet dreamed of climbing ladders up to the sky and meeting old bearded men at the top, with eyes like lamps whispering prayers to the wind. Their words were like gentle doves or tounges of flame rising on gusts like wings. He recited sura al fatiha and washed his face and arms up to his elbows and his feet upto his ankles. "Go lightly, trippingly, fly like a feather, a canary, go cheerfully like a hummingbird, a sharecropper walking jauntily, spade cast about his shoulders, his hair cast against the clouds. A boy, dreaming in the sky.

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The example of His light is like a niche within which is a lamp, the lamp is within glass, the glass as if it were a pearly [white] star lit from [the oil of] a blessed olive tree, neither of the east nor of the west, whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by fire. Light upon light. Allah guides to His light whom He wills. And Allah presents examples for the people, and Allah is Knowing of all things.

I dash the reed in ink and write upon the papyrus, or carve upon the bark in cuneiform. I write upon the sands with my feet, or upon the waves of the ocean with my oars, but even if my ink were the water of seven oceans they would not be able to exhaust the storehouse of His Reality, and of what He has written. And the tale of these siblings is but a part. So, dear reader, I hope that they have taught you in a way to listen, so that you will be able to see and decipher more penmanship or penwomanship.

Avan sang a grave, sweet tune, of rambling hills and terraces, of mysterious waterfalls and whirlpools in streams. Of climbing, of belonging to one's nation which was yet to be born, a talent springing in the heart, of seeing and internalising, of hearing and singing together with all people upon crossroads of the worlds.

Of braids and eagle wing feathers, coursing on the breeze, of veil and crystal, of raindrops each housing a palace, of snowflakes though which the sun shines like it does through glass windows, of weirs in the rapid river, each made of drying grass and thorny branches, housing fish, which they do not trap, but shelter and hide from the surging current for a brief time before they go swimming again. Each thing seen in the mind's eye in nature not in culture, made not by men's hands but by God's. But the development of men's minds, for the good of compassion, discipline, creativity and cooperation, as important as this. A joint commission between Him and us, to paint the world and construct it better from our knowledge of the architecture of the universe and our minds.

Red spools and quiet spools,

Spinning on the turning spindle

White thread, looping and flying

Among the Tulsi Brambles.

Shocking fresh fragrances
Of blooming leaves and Turkestan Mint
Flying with the Juniper scent.
It is the Lord's calling,
To be obedient to your talent
And bend and sway and turn the wyndlass
To draw water from the well.
And sprinkle your fields
Turning this way and that, east and west
Till the sluice gates water every furrow
Drag your shovel through the rich earth
Till the rain seeps into every crack and marrow
Of the tilled field.

The sky is reflected in the channels that lie unbroken
In between the fields
You shovel mud into them
To stem and dam the river. ---

You get a house foundation
Piped and bounded by the welkin
With the jewel rent, robin's egg
Blue, cracked and curving
From which crickets emerge with yolk.
And storks sip and suck and drink water
To satisfy their thirst.

--So the neighbours can have some too
\Moreover, for it to be a neighbourhood
Where people live together peaceably.

Know the watermark in the snowflake
Is the slight melt at its center
Which is not a sign of its being true to its elemental nature,

For if we lived at gelid temperatures,

Frozen would be the natural form of water.

Its sign of transition from being a crystal, cold, to flowing water, flexible

The line of symmetry blotted from whence it draws its shape

Thus we do not have to reconcile snow and water

Except to understand that in Inupiat language, every form of snow or water or what is in between

Has it's own unique name.

Buddhism would look at it thus:

Every element has its own worth

It is in both acknowledgement of what is, and the observation of transition between states,

That understanding is made.

Many girls weep tears into a pool of snow,

Never knowing how beautiful they could have been

And are in the first place.

(Choose: man's cocreation.)

I love her like my sister, for her compassion, and all of it. She once brought me to the store of loving, and almost set me free upon the ocean. She is a kind woman, such as mends things with her needle and ingenuity, of children not her own.

The sky is blue like a robin's egg, with fuming smoke and curtains of dust twirling like angry angel's breath, or white lime powder or Aurora Borealis. We draw the angel's stair downwards.

She bound up the leaves and tossed them into a river, where they arranged themselves spontaneously into a sail/rowing boat, with a filled mast.

The sides of a building picked out brilliantly like the crest of a rising wave, the buttercups on a dark valley, or cascading light upon a rough cliff face. Neither light, nor object can be seen without the presence of the other, and they are mutually bound in the dependence on otherness.

Whisper your wares to me, and let your merchandise curl up into the air like smoke, or like drying leaves pinched crimson with the cold, crying wind. A piece of cool metal reflecting the sky, like a lake, whose surface is disturbed by the gusts of air that blows ripples over it like twisted wax candles without a wick.

I admire ye, women of the air, whose flesh is like the arms of a mango, and whose arms are like blossoms fine.

The quiet of the seashore at noon is like a treacle bitten into at a stretch – the screeching of the noon-tide birds like echoes of shrill screams in the sand waves of a desert. The light filters through the straw basket casting a travelling, dappled constellation over a cool, dark dirt. Fish leaping through hoops of light, plunging through icy dashes, splashes, blocks of water.

Trust people to understand what they must, read from the simulacrum of dust, dirt, and cloud and sky, light and shade, breeze and cloud.

Swinging her satchel on her back, she went laughingly, but her eyes did not smile. The girl climbing, and climbing, and yet a top to reach? You can't just trust people to understand what they must, you have to explain your struggles to them, and let them explain theirs. Understanding doesn't always occur through osmosis. And then she saw the woman, leaning forwards with the weight of water on poles slung across her back, her eyes lowered, her hair blowing freely, drifting sideways in the passing breeze.

This time, we stood on a pier and were moved by the water that flowed beneath the bridge below our feet, passing in serene barnacly emerald ripples. The gnarly trees on the horizon were white and black against the cerulean sky. Even watching them from the other bank, the branches just over us dipped in the lake and their reflection wavered, blossoms cool, fresh, the lake a stark, smoky oval, sheds sharp, breath carved by cold breeze from the chest.

O traveller, I have loved you since before the birth of my soul.

Crunching numbers, reading fun. Catching juggler's rings in the sun. Sheila enjoyed reading out in the open, where the winds blew starkly casting the tails of her scarf in her face.

("You will be a harbinger of knowledge in this village," Yasinia had said to her as she and Sheila swept the floor together. "And you will say what you mean and mean what you say, and be as we say it, the "Word of God become Flesh". And I will help you enact the plans we have made.")

The people living in the deltas of west Bengal and Bangladesh traditionally have caught prawns, crabs, fish and lobsters, and then dried them before sale in the market," said Sheila in geography class. "Although it is theorized that ecotourism incentivises people to protect and conserve their local environment, by presenting to them the importance of conserving it for tourism in posterity, in practice it is found that very few local people actually benefit from the incomes ecotourism generates, which is pocketed largely by private players and outsiders to the locality who have set up shop in it. Regulations attempting to preserve pristine forests often come in the way of the local people making their ends meet with traditional livelihoods. For example, the fishermen in the Padma river delta are not allowed to fish in the Sunderban Tiger reserve, as their boats disturb wild animals such as deer which visitors would wish to sight on their tours from watchtowers, which is why the government prohibits the plying of fishing boats within this reserve area. Fishermen are forced to ply their boats in the small hidden canals of the river, overgrown by mangroves and brush, becoming vulnerable to tiger attacks, becoming victims of conservation policy itself. For this reason, fishermen find little advantage or benefit to their very minimal income through the promotion of ecotourism on their traditionally occupied lands. It has been found in studies on Nepal and China that very small percentages of the local population actually benefit economically from ecotourism, 6% in the Royal Chitwan national park in Nepal, where the Tharu people used to graze their livestock. A study conducted in the Jianfengling National forets park and Dioshuan National Forest Park in China's Hainan province shows that although local people "Support ecotourism and are optimistic about it," socioeconomic benefits from tourism are very limited and little educational opportunity exists for tourists."

A certain majority of the inhabitants of the Sunderbans earn a living through wild honey collection, bee keeping in Apiary boxes, and from dry and fresh fish catching and selling. The honey seekers travel with a shaman among them on boats, and the shaman is the first person to disembark from the craft. He must cast spells and seek the protection of Bon Bibi the sufi saint and arbitress of the forest, before others can disembark and start their business of luring the bees away from the hives by burning greenwood and creating smoke. Only after these rituals are complete, can the honey collection begin. These rituals are performed to lessen the danger of tiger attacks while they are emptying the combs of their honey. They always leave larvae and pupae in the combs, with enough honey to sustain them through their growth, before they make off with the collected honey in barrels, so that the larvae can mature into grown bees, recolonizing the tree in which they hatched, and build a new hive from which honey can be collected at a later date. Hence we see through this, a certain canniness in terms of conserving resources, considering the plight of the creatures whose treasure house from which they partially take, as human beings are always doing.

"One thing we can learn from the Bon shamans of Tibet and Northeastern India, and the Dalits of Southern India is that it is important to respect everyone, and to see God in all beings. Try to understand everyone, find some beauty or good quality or loveable trait in all. When you revere a person's essence, no matter a person's external appearance, they become beautiful. When you revere a person's essence, their behaviour becomes changed with respect to everything in the world, as well as you. You will be able to cooperate with them at work, and live with them as brothers, and sisters, mothers and fathers, and uncles and aunts. And when we relate to others, we should identify with them, trying to understand their perspective, try to understand their feelings. All relationships are dialectical, depending on exchange between subjects and objects, where subjects become objects and vice versa in an escalating system of love, of thoughtful acts and words. Are we being simple or complex here, hands on or intellectual? It's hard to tell, but perhaps we don't have to make that decision. I shall bring in something from Margrit Shildrick here, on the internalization of the other as intrinsic to our being conscious of it. The very fact of being conscious of a different other, means we recognize it, that it is already a part of us, however small, and the way we relate to it should be with this familiarity, this welcoming, rather than with rejection or repudiation. In rejecting anything outside of ourselves we in fact reject our very own selves, or the part of ourselves that perceives the 'outside' organism, rather than protect our own selves against it.

It is the respect that a person receives from another that allows him to reveal his thoughts to them, to explain his reality and suggest solutions or paths foreward. In this sense, in order to collectively learn, to exchange information, mutual respect is a prerequisite.

(Every being has a life, a belonging, an identity, which we must seek to understand before we judge them and should never attempt to use them for our own gain, unless we recompense them for more than they give us. We must understand how creatures are connected in their livelihoods in order to become responsible stewards of them.)

The mole eats algae, mould and mushrooms, and is therefore good to have them on one's farm, so it is inadvisable to fill up all moleholes on one's property or farmland, because the moles will then flee, destroying one's farm's pest control and fungicide system. When the French began to prefer frog's legs as a delicacy, they began to kill and mutilate frogs, only later realizing that frogs ate mosquitoes, which carries typhus, yellow fever and malaria, and which began affecting their citizens in large numbers.

Another example is the clam or oyster, which is a keystone species. Clams and oysters feed upon clamydomonas and algae, which respire taking in oxygen during the night, lowering oxygen levels in the water and disallowing the fishes from breathing, causing a species imbalance in the region where this eutrophication in present.

Via these examples we see that when human beings consider themselves supreme, disregarding the importance of other species or exploiting it indiscriminately, the harm caused sets up an imbalance in the material flows of the ecosystem, altering it and causing humans to lose out in addition.

When people in Mumbai and Bangladesh cut down mangroves on their marine and deltaic coasts, to build high rise buildings, many of which are empty of occupancy to date while most of the population lives in underserviced slums, they did not realize that they were destroying the roots that held fast to their soil and prevented its erosion. They caused the Mithi river draining the city of Mumbai to fill with silt and spill its banks, aggravating the flooding, and causing the Sunderbans in Bangladesh to lose valuable alluvial soil that would have been fertile land for their crops. Now, people of the Sunderbans face additional challenges. Sea level rise, caused by the overconsumption of fossil fuels in the west, leading to a proliferation of greenhouse gas emissions such as carbon dioxide, trapping the sun's radiative heat in the earth's atmosphere, is leading to saline water ingress in the Bengal/Bangladesh delta. Reforestation efforts in many cases are not succeeding due to the inability of mangroves to grow in in very salty soil. One solution to this could be to set up salt pans in the area, making salt collection a business that takes advantage of the current geographical conditions, and using the excess water from glacial melting in the poles through rainwater harvesting to irrigating farms in drought prone regions.

Do you know what *Streemukti Sanghatana*, an Indian union of women ragpickers, has done for their people? It has organized them, giving them livelihood security, medical rights and schools for their children. It has also commissioned the building of biogas plants into which kitchen waste and leftover food is put, to be decomposed and converted into methane, which can then be used to run kitchens, fuelling cooking fires in people's households.

In essence, it is cleaner than using fossil fuels (coal, kerosene etc.) as it does not have any black carbon or smoke output. It also keeps methane from leaking into the air from the kitchen waste's organic matter decomposition, which is favourable for controlling climate change. Methane is 22 times as potent a greenhouse gas as carbon dioxide, which itself is a product of aerobic respiration, whereas, methane is a product of anaerobic decomposition. (A form of chemical disintegration which takes place when organic matter decomposes in the soil without air, specifically without oxygen.) When organic matter decomposes in the soil, it forms a combination of carbon dioxide and methane. But when it decomposes under totally anaerobic conditions in a closed off environment, it produces only methane.

By producing methane from kitchen waste under controlled conditions and burning that gas for cooking fuel, one prevents the release or leaking of the highly greenhouse potent gas into the atmosphere, preventing it from trapping heat and altering the climate.

Add part about human waste being used on fields as an ideal.

Exude love for all creatures, including the lowly cockroaches, caterpillars, molluscs and centipedes and God will be truly merciful towards you, and you can lean on his strong arms. Instead of killing these creatures, if they appear in one's house, take a cup or a pot and place it on top of the insect in order to prevent it from running away, and slip a piece of paper under it. Then lift the whole thing, taking it to the street, the farm or the garden, and release it from the confines of your house.

The Jain priests in Gujarat wear masks to prevent the inhaling of insects, and wear veils to prevent the colonization of lice in their hair. They also carry brooms to sweep the ground infront of them, to rid the ground of insects upon which they might step. They wear masks to prevent inhalation of the creatures through nose or mouth.

Our religion, Islam, itself forbids the killing of an animal, unless one's life depends upon it. For example, one is not even supposed to kill a goat or a chicken unless one is completely famished and would die without immediately consuming a part of it.

In Jainism, not only is the consumption of any kind of mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish, mollusc or insect flesh forbidden, but also is the consumption of tubers, seeds and roots such as carrots, onions, potatoes, and mushrooms. It is believed that these parts of plants carry the life propagating properties of their species and to uproot, kill or eat them would thus be an exploitation. Such would be worthy of being called a sin, because it is impinging upon another's right to live, and is a denial of other creatures' right to life and self-propagation. Such an act amounts to grave crime, leading an unholy, undignified, unenlightened and defiled existence driven by the pursuit of the principle of self-gain and devoid of true compassion and companionship. It is punished by an afterlife of burning in the volley of the many furnaces of hell, to be roasted one's own proper self like the meat one used to eat. This is the gods' retaliation for one's careless behaviour during one's chance at life. Self-starvation in Jainism is considered preferable to the consumption of forbidden things to keep one's life intact.

Mewing and mewing like an attention seeking, starving kitten. Tumbling all over the woodworks in the craftshop, upsetting chisels, knives and logs, jumping up above the hearth, and biting its own tail like a snake in reverse coil.

Curled up upon the chair infront of the fireplace, assiduously biting its own tail.

Each creature on earth shares life with others, that is, derives its life force from the company of others, and energy and motivation to act through their companionship. Thus we human beings are meant to feel and savour and laugh about the tickling feeling of the cockroach as it runs about the floor, the fuzziness of the rabbit as it levitates itself in the vegetable garden so that another rabbit

can run across under it; is not the adorable roundness of the cabbages like children's heads, growing happily behind the fence of the garden, also worthy of attention? Even if a creature is not necessarily 'cute' at first glance, one can gradually develop a love for it through a careful observation and understanding of it. Make it your life's mission to be attentive to all creatures and watch how many friends you'll make. The tall, the short, the furry, the bare, the leafy, woody, fast and slow. They will all love you in return and in turn the soul of your love will live on as a part of them, making you immortal. For God bestows this gift on those who cherish beings other than themselves.

Not only to relate, but also work, was the goal of the created human being.

And you cannot get by simply by loving. You must earn your salvation through labour and understanding, merging your soul with that of the world. The day you do the work that God intended for you to do, the work that calls your soul, you will be friends with everyone.

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Back in the time of the skirmishes, when she attempts to bring peace

In her dreams, she followed the path of the Kurds, their dreaming muddy sandline creases of their cheeks, the leathery weather-beaten eyelids, crinkled, of fairy tern feet, day watching, gazing, veiling their brows like lace, wrinkles that swathed their eyes like masks, ruddy, pale, sallow browned, coffee black, their robes reeking of shadowed mint, heather, hazel, willow, cardamom.

Their feet conjured swirls of dust building whirlpools and tempests spiralling through the atmosphere, colouring the air pink, salmon coral, petunia, flamingo, the colour of the flower of paradise, a consummate blossom. Their weathered hands held the tethered bells of sheep, clattering down the rocks, lit by lanterns of furze, lamps of bulrushes, sedge, pine, acacia and grassy sorrel. Wreaths of myrtle, white carnationed, their robes flying like ragged cloud, their royal hair like scaled wind, braided tassels webbed with daisy mountain trails and dragonfly wings.

The incense floats up to the heavens like a herde of geese rising, screwelling, spiralling up the wind. Shifting screens of sand, carved like the trellises of a minora, the candelabra of mountain mists, the glowing of the peated marsh, burning with lilies of fire, bursting forth like anenomes, shining upon the coconut fronds, tall banana blades, waving like Pegasus wings and papaya saplings, waving their leaves like scimitars

A girl, wearing a pakoul, a shield of the hair of her head; a girl wearing a veil, a shield of the flames of her hair. The curling rings of her jewellery like the gentle calling of the bird hoopoe; the curving of her spinning locks like a fang twirling in a circlet of diamond, the sun's diadem, the wedding band of its eclipse. The girl stretched out her arms to draw and embrace the constellations; to measure the breadth of the clouds, the illumination of the shining pearly dust, the snowy fleece, the bullocks and the cows, the herds of grace and flocks of swans and barricades of fountains and gushing rivers, and the tumbling battering pounding, beating, shivering and straightening foam, the iridescence of the half moon on a nail, the shimmering of a sickle on the lapping waves. The laughing of the water the chattering of the gulls and boats and squawking ducks. The beating of a goose's wings and the calling of the egrets leewards, the dawn of a pure morn.

The blue peacock throat, pigeon's wing, hue of the mountain, wavering and pierced by glory pure, lemon spewing, layering through the smoky dust like latticed windows and climbing pagodas, rice farmer's hats, tam-o-shanters and scallop shells piling upon mussels, barnacles, brussel sprouts.

She walked towards the mountainous giants, some shaped like ogres, others shaped like cows, giantesses, warriors, sorceresses, gnomes and fairies, angels and camels, helicopters, flighty warriors, while she carried them vessels of water on her head, her toe-rings leaving scratches or pinches on the sand and her heels kicking up dust behind her like dragon-spurts of flame.

Her shining hair, floating infront of her like a storm of fishes, floating like an ice block riding on the foam, swirling like the milk of a coconut cast upon the ocean, leaking like onion shoots curling and pecking among the ripe, raw corn, the thawing blue sheaves, the waving leaves, the mills of the

barley and the quills of the baby egrets, floating among the high crests of circling clouds and mountain passes.

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Chestnut, Hazel, sorrel, emerald eyes looking intently, reading and writing. Homaira, the seventeen year old reaper girl, sat just beyond the cave entrance, bathed in the setting sun, which fell like a slanting ladder of light upon her notebook casting a shadow from her pen, with which she was inscribing verses.

"You're doing well," said Rahim Khan, the scholarly cartpuller of nineteen years, yawning, tired, joyful. "It won't be long till you can read the good book, the cast-out newsprint, the sheaves of old poems from the Shahnameh."

"It's hard," said Homaira. She stretched towards the ceiling, her arms brushing the stalacmites and stalactites and columns from where they met. "Although ease and relaxation were never my strongpoint."

"I am aware. You and your father, you work hard, labour in the fields, it seems always and forever."

"It is our imperative."

"Mother always encouraged me to do well at school even though she is illiterate til my father taught her,' Rahim Khan said. "For the day, she might pack me a dabba of rajma and hot naan, though on somedays, goats cheese when there were no beans. It is encouragement, that wins people wars with themselves, not the other way around.

"Are you saying you had to war with yourself, in order to study?"

"No, just saying that some people never had the resources to back booklearning."

"I do love Shayri, won't you give some to me from your childhood? Said Homaira. "And I shall spout verse spontaneously, stuff I could never write down, at least not until I can."

He began. "To be a rebel without a cause is the worst thing that scars the earth; let me be rebellious in all things, excepting war." Looked at her to continue.

"Hennaed palms, trellised like grapevines on an arbour, dripping grapes into the mouths of hyenas and foxes, who swallow them, one sweet and the other sour."

He listened. "Go on."

"A sky of blue enamel, a roof of hay, a flamingo, flying, a pool of jade stone, deep as a well and shining as an ornament. Anklets and bracelets, hanging and jingling on the heels and wrists of a dancing girl, a flying comet, who stamps her feet in the sand through a staccato thundering, swaying flight of steps, her figure, ornate as the carvings in the marble screens of the mosque or darga, which is the altar at the precipiece of surrender."

"But dancing, reading and writing, are the furthest from surrender. Unless you surrender to instinct." She said uncertainly.

Rahim: "My feet spinning, my arms turning, my head reluctant to turn, but my eyes, always fixated upon that hook on the wall, like a true acrobat, or a pivoting performer, a shunting dancer, clicking, pirhouetting on the floor.

"Wah!" said Homaira: I love writing in this book, this book made of leaves and wood, digested into pulp and screened into paper, which was blank to begin with. See, we have to take whatever makes sense, and make sense of whatever doesn't. See, how the sun sets, how the sky ashens, blushing a deep purple, like the crushed violet flower upon the cape of some haughty duchess?

Rahim: Or rather, a blooming larkspur in the crown of some queen of the harvest, Giselle, the peasant girl?

Homaira: Ooh, Albercht just got off scott free, didn't he?" speaking of the aristocrat who had masqueraded as a peasant and deceived the peasant girl Giselle. "I don't condone such behaviour. But yet, let's think about something else. Poor rural peasant folks are much more sincere about what they say, their dealings, than gentry. Shame!

Music! A swaying, sweeping, careening traction a metal pan full of stones and cowrie shells, a tambourine shaking, the screech of an eagle, the shuddering shaking of its flying feathers, its expanding wings.

The lash of a lion's tossing tail against a wall, a wall of sandstone and granite, red and yellow, the colour of baking naan. Women and men dancing in lines, bobbing their heads, wriggling shoulders and thrusting chests, casting their collarbones heavenwards, like drummers tossing sticks into the air.

Homaira continued. "Sourcing metals to make war machines; the engine fails, both pilot and residents below are sacrificed, the trail of burning engine streaming like a shooting star, to the already cracked earth. A charred body within the cockpit, and charred bodies all around, trapped within the walls of the house upon which it has fallen.

Bombs falling from healthy aircrafts, exploding with shrapnel, and broken glass, and chemicals, on fire, lodging in the hearts of the innocent, hardworking wondering children whose mothers give them of bringing water from the tubewell to the dwelling before school. The glass within them was never made to harm, kill or maim. Or was it?

The intentions of the weapon-makers are what convert it from champagne goblets to bomb interiors, aimed and poised to lodge in the flesh like darts, leeches, ticks, like parasitic cocoons clinging to a tree's leaves, weighing her down.

Words are just air, they cannot convey the pain of actually being targeted, demolished, harassed by the privileged from without by scientists who take it upon themselves to compose these witchlike, clockwork bombs. It's not just the bombs, it's the minds of the masterminds who are sick to the core. Who, when trained in Biology, which supports medicine, would deign to device machines which would shatter people's faces, their shinbones and their ribs? Which now puncture a lung, now labour to expand to let in a blessed gust of air? I only know that in future, when these men and women masterminds are herded into hell, they will be made to see a time which is eternal, and which no one can rescue them from. They used their capabilities to destroy others, and now they cannot get their capability back, even to save themselves."

"Back on earth. A girl, playing a violin. Pulling the bow back and forth against the taut strings, as though coaxing laughter from a friend. Shaking her head and smiling. Hair spilling over her shoulders like chestnut shavings from a carpenter's chisel. And bobbing up and down like a lotus on turbulent water.

Homaira told Rahim: "Did you know that stones had to be rolled on logs, when they built the Buddhas of Bamiyan?"

"I don't think so," he said. "They actually carved them out of the mountain."

"Well now, what with the landslides, they actually have logs rolling down the mountain's stone-face, like tears, not the other way around."

A walk through the forest.

An open pomegranate in the valley, a shock of roses among the greenhorn and young wreath of bulrush and brambles and thorn. A sudden gambol of a fawn among the rushes in the thickets of juniper and ivy and morning glory and shorn pine, worn lupin and sworn maple excoriated by the needles of bees, strung and stung with the necklace of a spider's gossamer webs, the beads of dew and pearls of raindrops, darts of billowing heavens, like drapes of morning sunshine.

In which the dust motes gleam, the ground wheat shines, in which the five petalled flower, pink as coral, bright as salmon, polished and demure as a maiden's lips, raises its opening arms and blooms,

unfurls its palms and un-whorls its fingers, to catch the dust and wind and cast forth its brawling fragrance.

A netting trawler to cadge the motes and shimmers of dust, the glimmers of the meteorites, a sweeping bride's veil, a trail of showering, shattering hail, sundered, broken into shards, sharp, gleaming, steaming, latticed and frail. Flakes six pointed like a divine pentacle, Venus' limbs and flaming hem.

A russet haired reaper lass tugging the heathen shovel strung across her shoulders, travelling to realms of fire and light, glancing metals, dancing coppers, shining marbled leather, the glistening arms. She has a feather down her forehead, a forest in her veil, a canary in her throat, a peacock's train between her eyes. A sculpted rib, emerging from a truss, a tow of wax, a scented wing, an angel's hair, a fairy's blessing trail, leading a creeping crust of moss, climbing her calves, her binding toes.

Patterns of leaves and interlocking rings of amber, spokes and wheels and spirals beneath the bark of the tree, leaning trails, spinning fibres, woven strands, leaping springs.

Dancing by the firelight, whirling, standing in a lodge subsumed by mists, by curling tongues of sprites, breaths, haints, wrapped as though in a foetal caul, or the hulls of cashew, husks of pistachio and mint, parsley and cumin bound together, in pigtails and bunches like helms, bouquets fern-stalks and rains.

Her face is the radiance of the sun, her eyes like bolts of marble and spring pools, murky with the slurry of lily pads and queen anne's lace and bamboo and chickweed.

Ever widening caverns of spun sunlight, darting, gleaming, chasing, gathered in a fortress of stems and branches; palaces and battlements, towers and gables of banyan tree roots curling like staircases in castles. Scallop-shells and mussels, barnacles and crabs, seaweed awnings, curving periwinkles, cowries for corridors, spiralling like conches and sprawling balconies of limpets.

A breaking umbrella frond, shattering, coursing, sprouting, its leaves poking out like blades, cutlasses from between grasshoppers' pirate teeth. Princesses brewing potions, imprisoned above buttresses of storm-clouds, gathering, to whom sing minstrels in the galley-ways, lit like glow-worms in skeletons, leaping eels.

Sheila's veil crowned with ornaments, sickle and full like the moon and stellar sequins, glistening coins and chimes of opal that sang and resonated as she walked. Her attire was an ocean blue with sleeves that swathed her tea brown wrists, faint and light as sparrows, like the mouths of swallows, reed like flutes, or willow boughs, bucking and straining like a sail in a tempest as she worked.

She ran like an eagle, glided like a swan, pert as a woodpecker, compassionate as a mynah, melodious as a bulbul, timid as a quail. She was proud and free like a bear, wild as a muskrat and cunning as a racoon playing hide and seek with the shadows, slender as a gazelle and crisp as a roebuck whose hooves clip clop down the stiff cleats of cliffs down the ragged and weather-beaten coast, the fierce thistle grown shards.

Her hands spewed petals and rims and skirts, little bits of iris and lavender flowers, the veins in her fingers like starry amethyst rings, lupine and (larkspur) blue, lily-pad tinged with misty orange for a fringe.

Her eyes were the lakes of stormy passes, the fleeting silver sky; its waves were ripples of tears, the rocks, flagging stones were like the boughs of her lashes, which shone with blue mussel, barnacle and gilted abalone.

The girl with the azalea boughs for a crown, and the larkspur buds for a bracelet, and the silver arrows for earrings and the teapot spouts for tassels on her epaulets, ripples of the ocean for her brocade on the azure vest of her breastplate.

And thus she made better than a gun for a soldier, a running, leaping bullet of a goose, a slender, planking chambermaid of equal proportions of dark and light.

A gambolling ewe, a white-veiled queen, a lynx, a stripling mage, a heraldress of the sun's chariot, of the spinning wheel, the whirling disk of daylight, and the steam of caravans and lashing chords of the yurt frames and poles, running in circles from wintertime till spring, from summer to autumn, form shivering to sweltering, from icicles to thawing.

Weaving in among the aspen trails, the spear-grass and the spruce and sedge, the wreaths of mulberry and thistle and trout rod, among the careening catarachts of ice sheets that form in the splashing streams, forming feathery glissades, polishing and chewing rocks like chisels, gouging wedges, carving knives, carpenter's planes, tomahawks and axes of yellow flowers, thorny furze, sharp razor teeth, growing out of a cottage out of the earth, its mossy steps and alcoves and peaty hearths, the lantern holes of the tundraic bedrock, spilling and spewing out wreaths of ignited mist and steam.

Death and Poetry had never seemed more inseparable than the night the six-thumbed Toryal Khan, commander in chief of Mehsud's East Kabul faction had fallen asleep on guard duty in his tent. The light that shone upon his face and knees, from the sickle moon like the profile of a Persian queen, for a moment eclipsed; perhaps that was why he woke, guilty and shivering; struck a match in the vacuum of silence. A sudden gasp of flame, and his whole tent seemed full of shadows, leaping, flickering; he barked tersely: "*Khabar ast*" and cocked his gun. An offhand movement, no more than a menacing reflex; and everything was still. Then, quick as a bird at dawn, a shape darted in the doorway of the tent. He siezed it by the arm and shook him like a snake, thrusting the burning matchstick to his face.

Nor assassin, nor thieving urchin; but the soft arm of a young girl did he find in his grasp. Her huge dark eyes filled with all the light in the tent, wide with unspeakable terror. With a surge of fury Toryal Khan saw his carved dagger clutched in her fingers, and gripping her fiercely as to elicit a sharp scream, he threw back his head and laughed.

'Hamshirah, for what reason are you wroth with me? ?'

'Not wroth with thee, Agha Sahib, but to sharpen my own knife,' said the cook girl in a low voice. 'Forgive me, but I have nor blade nor stone to make my meat knife keener.' She grew petulant. 'I say, you'll have no broth tomorrow, if you do not lend it me!'

'Aye, vagrant,' said Toryal Khan roughly, eyeing her with scorn. 'You could not ask me yesterday? Go thou, take the knife, but bring it back here in the morning. And if I catch you thieving round my tent again, I'll not be pleased, so look to't.'

She waited until the tent was somnolent again, until the snores emerged like waters churning.

She had to locate the keys for the box of explosives Toryal Khan kept in his breast pocket. She rummaged first in his pant pockets, removing his wallet; she rifled through it – no keys there; she stealthily crept over to where his breast pocket lay, covered by one powerful sleeping hand. With the utmost cunning she slipped her fingers beneath his palm to drag out the keys and lo! And behold they jingled in the crook of her index finger, caught upon it like a fish on a baited line.

This she attempted in Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's tents, slipping in as a market girl with one sack of potatoes to his cook mujahideen. When thrown with a match on them they smouldered slowly instead of exploding.

She woke, earlier than the men, went to the river and performed her ablutions, washing her previous day's clothes and vessels in the stream. She took a long time over the jug, reused its water for the rice dish and praised God for the sparkling fountain that poured forth from it, said, your smile is seven times as bright.

Still high, she felt in her pockets for the keys. They were still there, presumably no one had discovered their absence yet. It was time to hack the tin box in which the incendiary equipment such as grenades were kept. Composing herself, braiding her hair into a neatness that became her thin frame, she traipsed to the stock tent where the tin box hid, slid in through the flap, and beat a tattoo on the tin box with her work worn fingers; it was definitely full.

It was light out day now; Shaida went to the quarry with sacks used for wheat and rice and potatoes and filled them with sand. She was their infiltrator; she was so tiny she could fit through any tent flap, slide through any truck doorway, fit in the gap between chairs in any jeep, sleep in any man's cast off blanket on the margins of as a guard tent for the night.

She brought them to the incendiaries' tent, slipped in stealthily and began to uncover the canvas of the shell bombs to take the soda lime out of them and put in the sand, so that their conflagration systems would stutter and their explosion device malfunction.

Quietly as a swan preening she slipped the jangling keys out of her pockets and snitched the metal into the lock, turned it thrice and the hatch juddered open. Sacks of explosives faced her standing frame, heavy laden with soda and potash, the ingredients of gunpowder though thankfully the matches lay in the frayed lappings on the other side of the tent.

She dragged one out of the tin trunk by the dint of her thin shoulders, the collar bones popping out with the veins, laid it on the floor, took the opening in her hands and shovelled out the potash and collected it in her bag, poured in sand, and mixed it, folded it closed and hove it back into the trunk full.

The waste potash which lay in a heap on the floor, she covered with her veil to stop it from taking, flaking into the air and swept it into her gunny bag from which she had emptied sand, and dragged it into the open air.

She let the gunpowder fly out of her canvas and jute gunny bags like carved screens of sand on the wind, lattice windows, snowflakes, each one special and unique. Then she went to wash the bags clean in the brook, drying them on the curved surfaces of her wool woven tent dripping and evaporating, singeing in the heat like wheat popping. And when she smiled, a pearl flashed in the sun.

She hung the keys on the string near the doorflap of her tent and sat back with satisfaction almost as if she were smoking a cheroot lounging like a warlord. She was done.

The stems of a lotus reflecting palely in the chalice or the trough of the chestnut shavings, or the locks of a firebird's wings, flamingo candy, red cardinal's hoods and red ibis feathers, the flames of a cookfire seething, like the satin ribbons of flare, blowing sleeves, and curtains of a tabernacle, the billowing saffron robes and drapes, and prayer flags of a shrine, engraved with hymns of elixir.

"Do not be ashamed about love,

The ones who scorn you will

Thank and applaud you at the end of time,

That you held the globes aloft on your

Shoulders as you intertwined your hands.

Food and raiment are necessities

Talk and friendship are what build

Your strength to work

Even if that is a conversation with the Lord.

Stuck, I will be stuck on you forever more,

Moreover stuck on the friends I must lift from hell of confusion and tyranny

Stuck in love to unstick hate

In the muck of terror and the frightened breathing of a mother bird fighting off an eagle who seeks to uproot her chicks

I shall be as sincere as a child

Who returns buttons she finds

Scattered on the floor,

To their owners, her siblings.

But finders, keepers, losers, weepers.

Doesn't hold when the finder is

The person who lost in the first place."

Homaira was weeping at dawn, as she woke at Rahim Khan's side, having dreamt about their youth when their locality had been the roosting house of militant extremism, stealing the youth who otherwise felt they had nowhere else to go, and needed people to guide them in how to make a living. Rahim was still asleep, chasing dragons, in other words, the plumes of bombs, to find out the masterminds, or fountains with a wooden cup, in his dreams. A whiff of the cup of Lutuf, the consistency of condensed milk, and the flavour of cardamom and tamarind, strengthening them for the next struggle, the flavour of something divine which gives knowledge.

The neck of a swan, soaring above its plumage of swimming white tulle, its body of swift feathers growing in whorls and possies of drifted snow, of beating wings, swift, gleaming down, the hillocks of a sledding, down which toboggans slide, careening, their riders screaming in glee.

The drifting heliometer reflected in the helmet of autumn leaves, on the nest of robins' beaks and breasts, drying, parching twigs, their rays whirring like the strong beating of the flight of an angel.

The jewel is in its lotus, the substance of its casings, the pine seeds clinging in shingles to its cones, like goslings fastened and nestling to their mothers dewey breast. The piglets that squeal scatter round in hay, eanlings of milk and nibblers of corn. Emerald, sapphire, sky and tree, turquoise and jade, lantern and cobalt, and sorrel, rust and copper, malachite of the peacock's irises, sweeping through the forest of shade, fragrant buds and rustling leaves, the snarls of branches and frizzling honeyed reeds, veins and grasses, twigs and brambles, bushes and briars, shrubs and thorns.

Leaping over paddy shears and palm fronds and red woods and oak, oat-flowers and millponds and tadpoles and scum. Young crows and hatching chicks, and lutes and mandolins strummed. Dust gnomes and glade fairies and dancing shears and swords and sabres and scimitars beaten into ploughshares and spades and pitchforks into shovels. Tambourines and triangles and cowbells, anklets and cymbals. Tall sequoia and climbing sponge, moss, clamydomonas topped, reaching, brushing the gelid winter of the sky, scraping the hide of the clouds, the circus tent roof, woven with sweet smelling grasses and the forget me not blues of the welkin, stifling hot in the summer, and swept clean, cool like the plunging lake of ice after a baking hearth fire, in winter.

Saskatchewan summers short and wiry; the tulips popping up with sunflowers and hollyhocks, that sparkle through the roasting air, sniffing and swift, shingled and soaring, sifting, mingling, weaving shimmering wreaths. Ground-flowers, milling and cartwheeling, running, stitching, spinning. The shining cloth, the snow-white robe of the gardener, hanging from the heavens with pentacles of sparks, glimmering.

Donkeys clamouring, pack mules neighing, their sides strapped with cargo, saddles settled, stirring the wind, lathering up the dust, licking the roadside, their hooves like irons of thunder, their manes like flying chains.

The aubergine and the drumstick, growing, the tangleweeds among the hollyhock and the marigold, the hibiscus and the bougainvillea.

"Zarina," said Sheila. "Come and harvest with me, by the bounties of Allah." Zarina with the twisting, coiling hair, growing from an unsure cap, a confused and welcoming scalp, and the rope-like arms inured to work, the chiming bangles and armlets that rang and shone like sun and moon.

constellations singing, hung together by the meticulous jeweller, who bent over the work, his eyes narrowed with care and precision, carving away with exacting zeal, hammering at the molten silver and softened gold, which he beat into tiny strings, sashes and pendants, forged stars and carved planets, the universe a speck of dust for him.

Down the paths and trails of Phunsuk Wangdou, flapping toes and trailing arching, flying heels, and striking peeling balls of feet, the young sower or reaper or water carrier stomps and slashes down like jerking bamboo poles swaying, buckets hanging on hooks on his shoulders, unfolding like the wings of an eagle, peering down from the sun.

The trailing grapevine of the twisting, clawed hand, the simple, gathering smile of peonies, sweet peas and forget me nots, all bunched together in a Queen Anne's lace bouquet of irises, blue lotuses and azaleas, hazelnuts and reeking violets.

Crocuses, sapphire and ash, ammonite, topaz, lapis lazuli grey and beryllium, grape indigo and rain-fled whistling glass, jamun squid ink, tossing sea.

Wool from flanks of lambs, pearly lined, flocking up the white glaciered peak, the limestone promontories of snow, the ivory skulls of rising cliff and ice, the rambling goats of Gilead.

The breathy pipes of the strung flute, hanging upon a band of her shoulder, bunched with the singing feathers of the kite, the iris muscles of a rose, the turning fibres of a lantern's light, the lashing fringes of its chords, leaning thongs and strands of rain. The shivering cassock, the strands of hair and strings of bows, the beaded lashes of reins, straps and bridles.

A conch, cowrie, mellow chords, chiming, whinnying. Medallions of the head, tunics of sprightly camel leaders, wrapped in caramel, buffalo butter, like the piled cumulus of a marble column of Ahura Mazda's celestials, shining, flapping, soaring, wheeling.

A mango scent, a guava bite, a pear slice, an apple core, an Annice star, a lemon bowl, a cinnamon roll, an almond scroll, a walnut breeze."

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She poked her head into the other girl's dorm room and said. "Yes? Are you ready to go to class?" And the other said, "Well, I will be in a minute," and closed her old and battered pencil case with a snap; she had been drawing the layout for a church square plaza in her architectural pad, and now that the blue print was half done, she rose, placed her copy of the thread bound Shakespeare in her satchel, ran her hand through her already ragged hair and blew kisses in the mirror, and traipsed out of the dorm room with the other girls in her wake.

The blueprint was thus: a fifty meter city square paved with cobblestones, pews of slate set up along the north side, at the heads of which hung a bell in a well's shed, infront of which was a stone dias, upon which was the circular altar, where bread was broken and prayers uttered, the roof was a panorama of paintings of creation. Of the sybils, Abraham, his sons and their wives at work, there were paintings, a windlass at a well, winding and creaking, supposedly the one Rebecca turned when she gave water to the servant and to his camels also.

She looked down at her diary for the day before. "Working in the cafeteria at the college as well as studying in it – that's what trust is, day upon day of listening and speaking and reading and observing – write a story about working in the Dining Hall, like Rafiq listened to you and you listened to him, and consuming people's minds, and changing the world subliminally. Academia as improving the lives, the bare minimum of workers as well." Talk about pathway 4.

She looked at her friend, said, "Did you do the reading?"

And the friend replied, yes, but I couldn't make head or tail of the Phoebe part. "What do you mean? Asked Jamila. "You know, the part where Phoebe says, I fly thee, for I would not injure thee? And Silvius calls her worse than an executioner, before that?"

"Oh, and Rosalind tells her to sell while you can, you are not for all markets?

Tells her not to be so proud and unattainable?

I really think Silvius is overdoing it.

But what about the part where he says, "Say you love me not, but without bitterness."

But still, "for shame, for shame, lie not to say mine eyes are murderers. Now show the wound mine eye hath made in thee. Scratch thee but with a pin and there remains some scar of it, lean but on a rush, the cicatrice and capable impressure thy palm some moment keeps. But now mine eyes which I have darted at thee, hurt thee not. Nor, I am sure, there is no force in eyes that can do hurt.

But I agree with Phoebe, it's a bit much to bear having one's own eyes called harmful to another person. It's imbuing her with evil, when she's simply resisting the insistent passion of some chance, random man.

She doesn't like parabolic metaphor at all, cause it just doesn't, and has never, served her purposes as a shepherdess, where honesty rather than wit, is the only thing that ever got her anywhere. You have to be honest about where you're grazing your goats, so that others can exploit the same pastures, and share the space, so that each person's livestock gets to eat their fill. This being, and being poor, she'd have to be forthright about how much food she cooked and consumed within the family. There are so many reasons why trustworthiness, and not sweeping hyperbole, would suit her behaviour while negotiating the class to which she belonged, that it makes Sylvius on the other hand, look dangerous as a shepherd himself, or perhaps insincere.

Rafiq said: "If anyone behaves that way towards you, we'll show them. Just remember, you're irreproachable, go about doing your work with serenity and pride, no one can touch you."

Mei said of Rafiq and his wife: "He's really all he's cracked up to be. With guys like him, things work in entirely a different manner. He studies, of nights, after finishing work, did you know that? If one reproaches another, it is usually because they allowed themselves to lean on what is fragrant and free, as if it were a many wintered oak, without doing the work of feeling themselves, not because that aroma promised too much. And people never meet one another randomly, but always for a purpose, a design to be articulated. Let's take him as an example and a model for other men."

"A willow's arms drape themselves in sadness round his scrawny shoulders."

When his wife, who was studying to be a doctor, came back from her classes to walk home with him, Mei and Sheila watched together, dreaming. "Eyes like stars, sparkling in a spangled banner, the banner of her forehead, that housed the laws and the reindeers reins. Her hair like rays emanating from the sun, falling upon her shoulders like light upon braes. Black hair, braided in two solid pythons travelling across the globe of her head, tied like rivers mingling in a topknot at the back, out of which fountains sprouted."

Mei stood at the ticket counter, her eyes boring into Sheila's.

"The hills remind us of the things to be striven for, and the distances we travel," said Sheila.

"Like our parents."

"Me and Aref and Yasinia, we don't have them."

"Of course you must have. You're lying."

"No, I never told you? We're all foundlings. Yaz is half Balochi half Tajik, and I'm half Gujjar half Uzbek. And Aref, god knows what he is, the landlords never even saw or met his mother or father. He just materialized."

"There was a time, a time when things were really miserable. I was ten, and the mom of one of my friends had screamed at me for hurrying up her son to come and play. Things just weren't the same. And then, sometime, around Christmas, I was standing up, cutting the green paper to make a diorama Christmas tree, thinking of how to carry my schoolgirl games forward with my friends, and how the evening light cast itself lovelily upon the table, and my heart suddenly healed."

'The means of production," said Sheila, "Have been given over to our neighbours for profit. Shall we then continue in penury? Or shall we raise our wealth from the dust of our homes, the sun of our terraces, the flames of our hearts?

Mei pulled her bow back and forth, calling wails and shudders from her violin, which was sweet as Easter marzipan. A juddering brisk rhythm, swinging and assertive, edgy as an untrimmed hedge leaning over a precipice over a deep and cavernous gorge or canyon.

"Because they will not listen to the prophets who inhabit the borders, they themselves will be forced into inhabiting the borders, barred from the very houses they built."

"The prophet says the people should seek the Lord that strengthens the spoiled or weak or plundered against the strong, so the spoiled will come against the fortress. But he also says that those whom he addresses hate the wise counsellor who rebukes in the gate, and him that speaks uprightly.

He says that because this audience has tread upon the poor, and taken from them burdens of wheat, they will not be able to live in the houses hewn of stone that they have built, nor be able to drink wine from the vineyards that they have planted.

We see that what seems strongest or established strongholds of stone and vineyards planted with the intention of producing a luxury good: wine, are actually what become unworkable and uninhabitable, because of the unnatural behaviour of their creators. Unnatural here means not recognizing the needs of their natural human kin, and taking away from these kin, what rightfully belongs to them of their labour.

On Natural Justice and Human Nature in the Prophets, Amos 5, part of the old testament, brings up criticism of some members of his Hebrew community who are ritually correct but morally wrong, and hence violate the godly principles and spirit who created man and nature both perfect.

The prophet Amos criticizes those who offer sacrifices each morning and tithes every three years to the temple, and those who offer thanksgiving with leaven, for things they will not share. They proclaim and publish the free offerings, but they oppress the poor and crush the needy. The lord says he will take them, the hypocrites away with hooks, and their posterity with fishhooks.

The prophet says that the lord has caused it to rain in one city but not in others, and members of the dry cities have gone to drink in the wet city, but not been satisfied with the amount they got to drink. Yet, he says, despite this crisis, the people have not turned to their Lord. He has smitten their crops with blasting and mildew, and palmerworm on their vineyards, figtrees and olive trees which had grown well, and yet they remain aloof from the Lord. He has sent pestilence like that he sent over Egypt in former times, and caused Judah's young men to be slain by the sword, taken away their horses, and made the stink of the camps to rise up to their nostrils. But yet they have not turned to the lord. In the verse, the Lord then says that he has overthrown some of them, and that they should prepare to meet him. He says that he is the one that forms the mountains, creates the winds, declares to man his thoughts, makes the morning darkness, and treads upon the high places of the earth, and the Lord, God of hosts is his name.

The thoughts of man and his soul, in early Judeo-Christian thought, are part and parcel of the nature that exists outside man himself, and man is master over them only in so much as he follows his nature. Man is a steward, a worker to the resources that God creates, moreover, man's natural or primordial nature reflects the characteristics of what is outside of himself: nature proper."

We see here that God is held to wreak punishment upon the disobedient through the medium of nature which they depend upon for livelihood, via blights on crops, insufficient rain, pestilence and stink to make them turn to him. The thoughts of man are also a part of nature that God commands. Herein, the thoughts of man, and his soul, in early Jewish thought are part and parcel of the nature that exists outside man himself, and man does not know them, but through God. This implies that the thoughtless and greedy are unnatural, rather than natural human, who were taught from the very beginning, to know and acknowledge God. Man is merely a steward and worker to the resources that the divine creates and bestows and woe to him that does not care for the orphan, the

widow and the less well to do. Moreover, man's most natural, God-fearing and obedient primordial nature reflects the characteristics of what is outside himself: nature proper.

Man was made, in later Judeo-Christian thought, according to Jesus, to seek the kingdom of heaven before all else and prior to all other things, and if he so did, all else that was needful, such as food and clothing, would be added to him also. Man was made, then, to survive on a minimal reasonable fare, and to travel light, and to seek to understand the laws that governed him and his surroundings through science, theology and literature, to fathom the mysteries of the mind and the social sphere of being.

Dancing like a stuttering door, square framed and stamping, pestering the earth with her heels, bare and strong, spinning like a pinwheel, her arms open wide like a valley broad, like a goose in flight.

"Love," said Yusuf in a deep voice. "Love is companionship, watching over, providing for, working together, walking together.

"Solitude," said Mei. "Is meditation upon the beloved, isolation, desolation, regeneration."

"Drums," said Sheila. "Are the woman's voice on the night of power, heralds to the deity, the rhythm of the heart and the seasons, unifying man and time and his surroundings through the sacred sound."

The three friends, they wrapped themselves in fleece wool coats and went into the night and ploughed and ploughed till the sweat broke out on their brows. They remembered in the old days, how in the old days when labour was the purview of the serfs, forced, chattel-like, slave like. But these collegians all managed their own work and were their own masters and mistresses. After all the history they had read, sometimes they could scarce believe it.

"Emily Steiner Cites the indeterminacy of poverty, of needing more than one has, and not being able to ask for what one needs. In Piers Ploughman, indeterminacy manifests itself in the form of the advice given by the woman who personifies Holy Church speaking about how not to act rather than how to act or behave, leaving one's moral actions to a degree of uncertainty or creativity, an openness to innovate, play and invent ("Love of God … is natural knowing). The author is told by Holy Church not to believe his body, and is implicitly encouraged to keep watch or vigil for his soul at all times. The lines go: "Believe not thy body, for him a liar teacheth, which is the wretched world, that would thee betray." Here, the world, referring to the rabble of individual men, is regarded as miserable and treacherous, as well as the body, a seeming implication that nature, or the body, without god or morality, or good direction, is something not to be trusted, is something unredeemed.

We see that early Christianity upheld indeterminacy, the inability to be traced, as a virtue of sorts, or at least a characteristic of those who were on the right path. Even in conflict with this, is the concept of being able to give religious testimony of one's life at the end. Hence, while life is lived, there must be an acknowledgement of and ability to live with uncertainty, but after life on earth, it was certain there would be rewards or consequences and being able to pin down the events in one's life and one's responses to them was essential to ultimate salvation after a judgement of one's witnessing. Being unstoppable, something that no one but God, can pin down, resembling Heisenberg's principle, which states that as one comes to know the location of an electron, one loses track of its velocity, and vice versa. This harks back to the indeterminacy of the disciples of Christ who went on missions of healing, casting out demons, and converting people. They were forbidden by Christ earlier to take money, shoes or food with them on their missions, for it was said that the workman is worthy of his hire. It was believed that taking their necessities with them would make them less receptive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and less able to perform the work they were called to do.

Indeterminacy also harks back to the theologian Stanley Jones' idea of the built in repair shop. In his day by day manual on how to live by the teachings of Christ and the experiences of early and modern Christians, he talks about how Barnabas, one of Christ's disciples, was beaten up and stoned because people did not want to believe what his testimony, but notwithstanding, he rose the very

next morning and walked 10 miles with the disciple Paul to the next destination, healing himself as he went, on the road.

According to Holy Church, man owes gratitude to God for the formation of his flesh and face and fine wit, with which man is duty bound to worship his creator while on earth. He also owes it to God for providing the earth with the bare necessities of man, such as wool and linen and food, meant to be consumed by man in reasonable nature to supplant his existence.

She says that measure is medicine, and that all that the guts ask is not good for the spirit, and all that is livelihood to the body is not life to the soul. She says that a liar teaches the body to serve it, and that liar is the world, which desires to betray man and to betray woman. Both the fiend or the devil and the flesh follow man together, chasing at his soul and speaking in his heart. Man is to let rightful reason rule, and is meant to keep as his warden of his treasure, Mother Wit, to distribute it to him at his need.

In terms of human nature, We see here that the flesh, (body) and the world of bodies are counterpointed as separate from the soul and the spirit. The flesh is conflated with the fiend, or the devil, and matter and the spirit are believed to be separate from eachother. The author is warned against the excesses of the world, which betray or harm the soul, and told that his body can tell untruths in what it desires. We see that the world, what is outside of the self, is, in Medieval Christian thought regarded as mysterious, dangerous and problematic.

Robin Hood operates courageously according to the laws of God, standing in for divine justice where it is being violated; fearlessly stymieing corrupt arrangements made by church officials and feudal Knights. One instance of this is where he restores Allin A Dale's betrothed to him when she is wrongfully wrested from his claim by the Bishop of Petersborough, who plans to wed her to his brother. The reason the bishop gives is that the lands and riches the maid possessed by virtue of her being a knight's daughter should not pass into the hands of a poor minstrel like Allin.

When he hears that the lands are to pass to the knight who is the bishop's brother, Robin exclaims: “Ah, there's money involved!” accusing the bishop of having a stake in the seizure of the girl's lands, and Lancelyn Green's prose mentions the old knight's eyes leering at the young girl who is being sold to him, for 'the marriage was nothing else.”

Humor and triumph in the way the situation is righted, are mainstays of the chapter. Robin Hood and Little John evince a rescue of sorts; wherein the seven foot tall friend of Robin, called, “Little” John helps himself to the robes of a low priest and the surplice or headgear of a bishop, at which these officials are obviously sorely discomfited, and ascends the stage with a solemn mien. Robin Hood marvelling, remarks at what a change the clothes have made in him, making him resemble a priest. But Little John remains his droll, funny self and sounds the wedding banns not the customary three, but seven times, lest, he says, that three times are not enough, while Allin a Dale and his bride are united in holy matrimony. Thus the rightful wedding is solemnized.

Concern and friendship are another mainstay of the chapter. After calling for the lawful bridegroom, to which Allin eagerly announces himself, Robin remarks to Allin, that he, Allin, “enters the church a bachelor, but shall leave as a married man”. In this we see a sort of encouragement by Robin, a turning Allin a Dale away from misery by an assertion that the natural course of events will indeed play out, and he will indeed be reunited with his true love. We also see that Robin Hood’s justice inspires loyalty in Allin, who pledges himself to be faithful to Robin’s band, swearing on the Bible to be Robin's true and loyal servant.

It is Allin’s value for his future wife as well as his respect for Robin’s reputation, that prompt him to declare loyalty, after which Robin is pushed to continue on the path of action as a protector of the poor and oppressed Allin, going to the extent of disguising himself as a minstrel with Allin’s garb, to rescue the marriage ceremony in the church and return it to its original course.

Another aspect that would be useful to look into is how fast mistrust and enmity are converted into friendship and loyalty in Robin hood. The second day before the rescue, when Robin meets Allin, Allin’s cheerfulness is gone, just as his fine array of scarlet is also gone and he hangs his head

and twangs a doleful dirge on his instrument, singing of lost love and hope cast away. When Robin's merry men meet him, they bar Allin's way, whereupon Allin leaps up, drawing his sword in a stance of defence. Robin's merry men urge Allin to come and meet their master, Robin. Allin then replies he has no objection, as he knows Robin Hood is a good man and has no quarrels with a poor minstrel like himself. The alacrity and quickness with which his defensive attitude is turned into a compliant one, is something to be noted, although it may be argued that that was the effect Robin Hood's name had on common people who were oppressed in the same way he had been in the seizure of his lands. When Robin stands face to face with the minstrel, he asks Allin if he has any money to give to him and his merry men, Allin replies in the negative, saying he has but five shillings and a ring, which he had been saving for seven years to have at his wedding day. He explains that he was betrothed to marry the "fairest maid in all the world," but that is no longer so, as they, the church her guardian, are calling her love for Allin but "a girlish fancy", compelling her to marry a rich old knight, and therefore his heart is broken.

Robin then asks what Allin might give him if Robin restores this girl to him. Allin replies that he has no money, but will promise, on the Holy book, to be his faithful and loyal servant ever after. Robin then asks how many miles it is to where his true love is, and asks Allin to be exact. Allin eagerly says that it is not more than five miles to where she is located. After speaking a word or two with little John, Robin takes Allin's harp, wraps his cloak about him and lights out to where the church wedding was meant to be held. Here again, we see on Robin's part this time, a quick transition between being the asker of money and being the bestower of the favour of a rescue. Between asking for alms of Allin, and risking his life to restore Allin's lover to him, there is hardly time to ponder. This is part and parcel of the alertness that Robin possesses as a hunted outcast and leader of more than a hundred outlawed men, each of which must survive in the forest, hunting deer illegally and remaining outside of the clutches of the upstart false King John and his church cronies and knights, and Robin himself see to this. Robin knows what danger is, and as an able bodied man, when it is his duty to avert it. Robins talent for making friends out of possible enemies is part and parcel of the project of self- governance, or ruling from the bottom up, the kind of society that Robin is trying to achieve in Southern England.

Think about how it is when we all listen to one another and the struggles we've faced, give one another company and solidarity, watch over eachother's lives and compulsions, help eachother out of addictions, make eachother true, trustworthy and hardworking through our belonging in the brotherhood.

The spiritual merit of one good deed or sacrifice, lasts for all eternity, all eternity, and will come to help you resist temptation.

What is happiness? The day that passes when you use no swear word, that no one's work or dignity is abused, that you neither see nor talk of lewdness, that you do not commit adultery, that your thoughts are clean, that you spend time with your family. That is happiness. On that day, you have a right to be happy.

Have you ever started your day with prayer? Do that, and watch your life change. It will change that very day. And spending the night in prayer, when your sides cleave from your belly due to the fear and mercy of Allah, that is happiness. That is the best way to spend the night, to pour forth your energies in worship and your mind will hear the mysteries singing and calling to you through the darkness, the feeling of closeness with the creator who calls you to speak to him. He is the best companion you could ever have.

We see a cataclysm henceforth from the moment Allin pledges fealty to Robin, and Robin asks him how far away his true love is. The atmosphere changes; the mention of Allin's true love in Green's prose puts us in mind of both truth and eternity, and this change (is also due to the fact that the location of one's true love must change space for the subject of whom one is talking. Untill then, the atmosphere was laden with unwilling ness and suspicion, after it is filled with trust and eagerness.

"Lanterns, pegasii, angels, celestials, sacred fires, precincts, priestesses, medallions, chanting and scriptures.

Candles and incense, sticks and stone statues, flutes and harps and stringing violins, and shadowy shrines and two way streets, tinkling ringing bicycles and bread-shops with their wares hanging over counters from the ceilings, and leaning bridges and railways bolting neath them, and industrial offices piled one on top of each-other's, like slanting houses of cards.

And milling crowds holding hands waiting at docks, and rivers down which cargoes sloughs and long poles pulling barges, hauling coal and steel, wonderful and frightening, miraculous and terrifying, the engine burning at the centre, incinerating the black gold."

"The one common thing between both the Arab worlds and the North American worlds is that they both at some point in time, kept black slaves imported from Africa, to do their bidding and heavy work which citizens themselves could not or would not perform. Both worlds denied these people citizenship. Today the black working class in America lives in a sort of penury, trapped between jail and the informal sector of selling drugs for employment, as the higher education system refuses to accept most of them, and factories have closed down and been exported to India and China. Schools pay less attention to black male students coming from poor backgrounds because the schools believe that neither would their parents be able to pay for them to go to prestigious colleges, nor would those colleges be likely to accept them, and thus the teachers do not invest much time or attention in those neglected children. The schools are looking out for large numbers of their own students to be placed in the top colleges of the country, to boost the schools' reputations. These students then are forced into the food service and retail sector immediately after graduation, if they graduate at all. And what sorts of jobs do they get, but food service jobs, reception, cleaning and the occasional manufacturing. All of which demand little intellectual progress from day to day, but an ability to serve, to endure, to live in the moment, to understand the workings of machines and political authority systems, turning or undermining them at will, to enjoy hard physical labour and to be loyal and caring, supportive towards one's friends.

"The Arabs," said Sheila sorrowfully. "Used to starve their slaves to death after they became too old to work because they did not want to support them. And they didn't even have the opportunity to protest. My mother was a Gujjar, a Dravidian woman, married to an Uzbek man, when I was born. That makes me black, as they say, one drop of black blood … That's why I'm darker," she said proudly, "Than Uzbeks, with nearly slate skin."

"Coal black is better than another hue, in that it scorns to bear another hue; the black swan's legs can never turn to white, although she lave them hourly in the flood," said Mei, quoting from the play Titus Andronicus. "I think black is noble, aloof, and dominant."

"On the contrary it is engaged, loving, and subservient, meek. And it is said that the meek shall inherit the earth."

"Let's not essentialize," said Yusuf. "I shall recite about who we really are.

We are the sons of the Baloch,
Free and sovereign,
Masters of our own destiny;

The earth panics from our wrath,
Castles shake in fear,
We are tigers,
Fearless defenders (of those who seek our help);

We are an encouragement to our fathers,
The pride and honor of our mothers and sisters,
Support of our brothers;

Our blood one day,
Will be required by our nation,
We will prove to the lullabies given by mothers;

We have sucked the milk of honour,
In the shadow of swords,
Red blood in our eyes shows descent from martyrs;

We are defenders of the helpless and the poor,
We have destroyed the castle of terror,
The days of oppression have gone forever."

Courtesy, "Brahvi Time, Brahui Poetry" Balochi National Anthem.

We won't stand for oppression from others; and we are a matriarchy, and we are inclusive.

"I wish I had had the benefit of that anthem and this community before I left home," said Mai.

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See how the papaya tree leaves, ten pointed, new-fangled, yellow spangled, has those yellow streaks through the reticulum? It looks like a cane basket woven, erupting into flourishing green leaves! Like the magic of a barren wintered branch in spring!

Take a walk among the sun and shade strewn paths and watch how the figs, fallen to the tarmac and dust road under the fig tree, surrounded by a tin roof, smelling rotten and sweet, are red fruits mashed against the floor, steaming fragrance, which squirrels come and nibble on and take into their mouths to store in their grottoes?

We may not all be equal in talent or in endowment of wealth or beauty or intelligence, but we have all been given the ability to be faithful. All it takes is the desire to be faithful, the will to work for faith, and the fruit will follow. Be a faithful steward of your talents and abilities, faithful to the lord who put you on this earth.

Peace be unto Abraham!

Thus do we reward the good.

Graceful!

How the grass spreads like wildfire across the soil!

Her cheek was a banking lee, her nose an elm tree, her eyes lakes of blue water, her hair the henna-tinged tresses of a bride.

With eyelashes the colour of ash in a forest fire, Bon Bibi says, "There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his only prophet." The third eye burns through the mists of the forest, sets its sparkle on the shining river; the air clears.

"O woodcutter, woodcutter, give me your axe! For I will requite you with a bundle of wood!

Never listen to such cries.

"O boat-rower, boat-rower! Give me your oar! I will row us away, twice as fast, from these spirits who seek to plunder us!"

The boat-rower says. "I hardly know your name. Shall I trust you?"

The girl of the forest, who has a chalk in her hand, draws a mandala, a map of the forest layout and the whereabouts of the spirit who is calling out to them. "It's Dokkhin Rai," she said. "He's furious that you took honey from the buzzing hives, and smoked the bees out of their comb when they had just industriously gathered nectar to feed their young. Yet, because you are poor folk, I gave these to

you. Now you must row your boat very fast away from this place, and must not come back for at least three months.

"How did you attain this state if grace and knowing about the thoughts and schemes of the forest spirits?" asked Potol, the cook of the honey expedition.

"I was raised and suckled by a deer, to whom I am ever grateful and call 'mother'. And through much fasting and fellowship with the creatures," Bon Bibi replied. "When I see or hear a creature in trouble, I go to it and rooting my feet in the earth, I observe it, speak to it and let my body become a channel to its pain.

I try to understand what it feels as though I am a cotton ball or sari, soaking up water from the Ghat stair on which it rests. Then, the creature senses my presence and its pain leaving it as it goes into mine, and senses the feathery light feeling, a bright spot near its hurt and the feeling of wellness slowly spreads into the rest of his body from the heart.

In this way, through my body becoming a conduit for the animal's pain, the animal is slowly but surely healed.

I then talk to it about how to avoid danger, so that it can avoid getting hurt a second time around. Like wooden branches are latticed together to erect the frame for a stable or barn, like cotton strands pulled together to make a mosquito net, I bolster and build up the animal's knowledge of the ways to safety and serenity by avoiding the 7 deadly sins: anger, sloth, greed, lust, gluttony, doubt and delay, explaining how to live the five pillars of Islam: profession of faith, *hajj* (pilgrimage), *roza* (fasting), brotherhood, and submission to Allah, as well as the five messages of Medjugorje: fasting, prayer and penance.

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"We need to get you to think. How Kiku the cat would answer if he was asked about the analysis of industrial growth in RJ's class.

"Rraoo! I think the capitalists have been gaining most frightfully from investment in automatic manufacturing machinery, as they no longer have to pay human workers to man them!"

"You are correct," said RJ. "This also leads to Jobless growth and deskilling."

Kiku tended to comb his fur with his teeth and his claws, not a real comb of course. Today, his fur stood up in a little clump above his head. RJ asked if it was quite the new rage of hairstyles.

Kiku replied that no, he had merely been in a scuffle with another cat and that was why his hair was still standing up at the top of his head.

"Oh dear, oh dear, you cats always seem to fight so much,' said RJ. "Haven't you ever thought of living in peace with one another?"

"Yes, but dear teacher," Kiku said. "You don't understand. A cat must fight to keep himself fit. Today I had a fight with a ginger cat who steals around my compound. We stood and faced off with one another and raooed till our heart's content.

Wait a minute," said Kavya. "I have that on video." She opened her phone, selected the video and held it up for all the people to see. The peculiar thing was that the cast were hardly moving as they raooed in eachother's faces, if anything moved in mesmerized waves on their bandy legs as though in a trance. And when they stopped, they both lay down almost next to each-other beneath the car nearby and slept peacefully, living like brothers or neighbours that trusted each-other.

"One of you, I will name China, and the other, India, in our hopes for peace and military disengagement," said Kavya. "If I am not much mistaken, dear cat, you were play fighting with the other cat, in practice just for self-expression. Not real fighting. May others learn from you.

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Do not begrudge the dear Robin, who taps at your window of glass with his yellow nostril-ed beak; do not complain about it, nor begrudge it a place to sit and shit on your porch. By layering the floor with his refuse one is like to tile it with oyster shells, opal and mother of pearl.

The gleam of the moonstone, like pearly, silver lined cumulus cloud. The freshness of the rains, like soft simmering mesmerizing cold steam, icy wind rising from the lake's breaking ice; the fiery maple leaf that falls to the frost; igniting it in mellow cider fragrance, the fire of wines, intoxicants of nature's past sugar mill, chilled by winter's openness, free roofless cellar, lack of shelter.

And will we know the sufferings, humiliations, beatings, each have suffered, each from either side? And will we know how to begin mending them? Remember, he who helps others, has helped himself already; God provides for him or her.

If you've been bullied, then remember this: there are other worlds out there. Other worlds that can be accessed through reading, writing and reflection, and talking to other people who've faced the same thing as well.

If you've been bullied, remember this: the moment you stand up for yourself, the bullies will fall away, because all those who are bullies, are actually cowards within. It just takes the memory of your self-respect, some planning in advance of what you'll say and do, and the anger and hurt you feel, to make you come up with an appropriate and just response to their behaviour, to counter it and hopefully stop it.

Also, you should probably alert an authority figure such as a teacher, a parent or a counsellor, as to what is going on with you and the people who are bullying you, as well as perhaps your friends at home or school, if they don't already know.

Talking unburdens the mind, and remember this: a sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. Besides, it might take the intervention of an authority to stop the bad behaviour of the bullies. Remember this also: the blessing of the down-trodden, as stated by Gloria Anzaldua: when you give ear to an underprivileged or ignored person, a new world opens up within your soul, a new space, maybe the door to a new universe.

Are we proud? Are we haughty? We shouldn't be. Being happy with our gifts from God, we should be willing to serve him with them. When praise comes, when criticism comes, it shouldn't affect us too much. These things come and go. And beware of the world's praise, than of the world's censure or criticism. It is when we are proud that we think we have reached a pinnacle, from which we can only climb down, not climb up. So lap up the criticism and improve yourself as best as you can.

Turning the wyndlass at a well,

Laughing, chattering, one's head kerchief coming undone,

Straightening it, managing the kids playing,

Zooming from corner to corner, chasing one another, laughing,

Squealing, careening, after one another like birds gliding in flight,

In galvanized currents upon the wind.

Sliding upon the gelid, ice-like atmosphere,

Up in the darga of the sky,

Like puppets hanging from strings,

In the ice-cream column of air,

And the cottony wool of the clouds,

Misty for the eyes of the ducks and birds,

Enveloping them like polar bears,

Envelop the husky dogs in playful hugs

Near the poles of the earth.

Among the snow-smitten, ice bitten swards

Of glaciers and landscapes of frost.

A goose, with a long orange beak and flutelike nostrils, honking, her graceful wing feathers fluttering and beating the silken air, through which she takes flight and rises, soaring on the gusts of wind, which supports each arch of her wings, and her long stretching neck, calling, flying ever forwards.

Hanging slopes, suspended lawns,

Sprawling over the rivers,

Bending, curving over the mountains,

Clothed in green grass and swards

Among the bending streams.

Esha Ray
Tribes in the Contemporary World Final Paper

MPhil Elective Course

Jerry Mander's Paradigm Wars in Anne Waters and Phillippe Descola's Native American Thought and Beyond Nature and Culture

In this paper, I will be exploring how configurations and concepts in tribal cultures clash with concepts in Modern Western Hegemonic cultures. In Chapter 1. configurations of continuity, Descola suggests that Shamanism itself is not a religion, per se, as shamans do not control the intersubjective interactions between various human and animal agents, but their role is derived from having mastered the techniques of ecstasy and the fact that they can communicate with supernatural beings which delegate them their powers, and that their role remains mainly that of treating illness. In this sense, control over the self, rather than control over one's surroundings and other individuals, is emphasized, with contrast to the tendency in Wester culture, which is to 'master" nature and 'tame" it and tap it to further one's own advantage, nutritionally, technologically or even politically and socially.

In the origin place of Shamanism, Siberia, hunters believe that the forest is governed by a spirit called "Rich forest" the keeper of game and the provider for his own daughters. By going to hunt in the forest, the hunter enters into an alliance with Rich Forest, as if Rich Forest were his father in law, and the hunter in his dreams takes Rich Forests' daughter as his forest wife. Prior to the

hunting trip, to avoid angering the forest wife, the hunter will abstain from engaging in any marital relations with his human wife. The hunter will also avoid eating meat caught on his first hunting trip, to avoid angering the spirits of the hunted animals by abstaining from displaying greed.

In her book, Native American Thought, Anne waters introduces cosmology as an ecological analysis: a view from the rainforest. The building of a cosmology which included all the different aspects of their ecological settings, became a blueprint for ecological adaptation to their surroundings and the ability to acquire principles to live in balance with it. Waters says that acute awareness of the need for adaptive norms can be compared with modern systems analysis. For example, the Tukano, have a highly adaptive set of behavioural rules which allow them to maintain an equilibrium and to avoid having to relocate their placed of settlement too frequently. Instead of clearing the forest to practice agriculture, which would have been like jhum or slash and burn, and would have necessitated that they move farm plots after the soil fertility got exhausted, the Tukano instead plant their corn, beans and vegetables in vegetable gardens which they grow in concentric circles around their houses, creating minimal ecological destruction. Also, because bean plants have nitrogen fixing bacteria in their root nodules, they fertilize the soil which the corn plants would otherwise tend to deplete. In the Tukano mythology, corn, beans and squash (a type of pumpkin like vegetable) constitute the three sisters, which are defined as goddesses of the harvest that came to a shaman in a dream, urging him to plant them together to feed the people, which would be a perpetually self-sustaining system, also leading to the intake of a balanced diet. Modern science has found that corn lacks vital proteins: lysine and tryptophane — as well as riboflavin and niacin, which beans contain, and eaten together they provide a complete protein profile for human consumers. "Carbohydrate-rich squashes are a great source of vitamin A, and their seeds provide quality vegetable fats that corn and beans lack. Together, the three plants constitute a complete nutritive punch." (Mother Earth New, the Three Sisters, John Vivian). Without niacin, human beings are prone to dihorrhea, dermatitis and dementia, and corn itself must be soaked in lye or lime-water in order to make the niacin available for digestion.

In other words, in the context of the Tucano system, the people have managed to create a cosmology and sustenance system based on hands on and intimate knowledge of their environment.

According to the author, content merit of a belief comes from the value that that belief holds in terms of the kind of behaviour it encourages, whereas state merit comes from the value of the state of mind that the belief bestows upon the person who holds it. Of course, they are interrelated. She also says that belief and understanding should come out of practice of the belief. State merit also springs out of how one came to believe or know what one knows.

The text also mentions that the means of acquiring knowledge is key in determining how it will come to be of use. The consequences of not applying oneself sincerely to the acquisition of certain types of knowledges especially those most important to bringing about a positive change in status quo, to removing oppression, can be longer reaching and more extensive in time and place than we can imagine. For example, if when doing a reading on racist behaviours one is sloppy about how one interprets it and absorbs it, then one may not recognise a racist tendency in a person's behaviour towards a friend who is in the racial minority. One may be unable to sufficiently substantiate upon the need for another friend, this time, a lawyer, to defend her in a case that she files against someone she has suffered discrimination from. In this way, the racist tendencies of others, which could have been curbed by the original person mentioned, by his/her reading the book on racism with proper attention, are in fact allowed to continue to operate because this person did a sloppy and cursory reading of the book.

Through this example, the author states how texts on important and relevant topics to one's lifeworld should be read and analysed with proper attention, just as he cites as an example the book on racism. One should be able to recognise right or wrong when one sees it by informing oneself and thinking through the subject properly, to be morally sound in one's further actions to counter that racism.

She says that acquisition of limited understandings on important subjects, because divorced from relevant belief practices, could be a legitimately culpable activity. (substantiate).

She states also that it need not be classified as admirable to stake claims to knowledge or understanding, formation of belief, maintainence of belief and change of belief or refusal to change belief, when or if these are divorced from an acceptable implementation of the relevant belief practices, and in fact, that such claims or acts are ethically objectionable, and ought to be avoided.

These concepts on proper application of the mind and experience of the reader to books or systems of knowledge, in order to make them fully operative within him/her as a human being, are in direct contrast to some of the tendencies of Western scholarship, which aim at abstract, often unapplied knowledge, so called "mastery" of concepts, with little or no merging of personal experience with the discipline or testing of the disciplines tenets with one's tacit knowledge, and use of the knowledge itself to further selfish ends.

Concerning the ethical aspects of knowledge, environmental observation and understanding received from visions, ceremonies, and spirits, Native Scientific philosophy reflects an inclusive and moral universe. The author states that no body of knowledge exists for its own sake outside the person's or group's moral framework of understanding.

Commitment to gain and share knowledge is an important aspect of Native Science, since deep knowledge of nature brings with it responsibilities in its applications and sharing. It is a given in Native traditions that deep knowledge is not easily gained and takes time and dedication to attain. Sanction and commitment are related to ethics, or the care and attitude with which indigenous knowledge is gained and shared. Knowledge among indigenous people is attained in a completely different way from that of Western objectified science) but the coming to know process is nevertheless extremely systematic.

For example, certain processes occur in a certain order. Like Western Science, indigenous science is sequential and builds on previous knowledge. But Native Traditions guide or teachers, ie individuals who have gone that way before—are necessary.

Chaos theory is that idea within Native Science wherein they believe that the disorder which exists in the universe, the movement and the flux, can have energy derived from it and that people should derive energy from the expenditure of other organisms' energy in the universe. An example of this would be deriving cheer from being in the circle among other living beings, deriving one's motivation to work, speak and think from the context one finds oneself within. Chaos theory therefore also refers to participatory or co-creation of the world as one comes to perceive and interact with others in it, shaping one's own views and actions and other's impressions through one's intentions. Because the reality apprehended is dependent on one's own intentions, it offers one the maximum freedom of action and thought.

Vortex theory refers to and applies to that phenomenon which occurs when a pot of water is kept just below the boiling point, wherein many vortexes of air in the form of bubbles or currents of hot water begin travelling upwards from the surface of the pot in contact with the flames, setting up a convection current in the water, of circular up to down motion. The moment the hot water stream reaches the top of the water, it gets cooled by the air directly above it, and becoming heavier because denser, it continues its path downwards towards the bottom of the pot, only to be heated, expand, and rise to the top again.

Anne Waters uses this vortex theory as an analogy to describe how in social and biological existence, the survival of any self-organising and self-sustaining system depends on its ability to keep itself open to the flow of energy and matter through it. Without this flow of energy, this exchange of external with internal, a being cannot survive. But this exchange of external with internal is bound up with creativity and openness to new ideas, and is hence very closely related to vortex theory. This necessity to exchange energies, may last a millionth of a second or billions of years, as it the case with the universe.

A third analogy which waters speaks of is the butterfly analogy, which refers to the idea that even small deeds by seemingly insignificant individuals can make a difference to the world, by influencing or helping others. An example she gave of this, was that of Gandhiji's satyagraha or war of truth, on various fronts, most notably on the charkha, home producing cotton fabric to make India self

sufficient and not dependent on the mill produced cotton from the British capitalist Mills abroad. His fastings also would have been a suitable example of the butterfly effect, during the Hindu Muslim Riots of 1945 during partition, wherein he refused to touch food or water until the violence stopped. In this case, an individual (Gandhi)'s satyagraha, from a person who had little to do with the British instigated enmity between people belonging to the Muslim religion and people belonging to the Hindu religion, became a force for their enmity to cease. This is an example of how one man or woman's action can be transformative on the large scale. This is also an example of a kind of governance from the bottom, the powerless, the meek, which is often in direct contrast with the style of modern Western capitalist supporting governments who function and thrive through the imposition of law from the top to the bottom, appealing to people's fear, rather than their consciences.

Waters also refers to the metaphoric mind as a product of the early impressions, associations and deductions people make as infants and children, which in Western society is subordinated to the rational mind, and becomes the subconscious. However in Native society, the associations and metaphors created by this metaphoric mind to describe external events and occurances, is a key element in communication, of expressing the self to the non-self or the 'other' about the non- self, or what exists outside the self, by wrapping and wending what exists outside the self into the self's understanding , past experiences and comprehension, and then externalising it, in a way that is comprehensible to the other person.

Individual freedom does exist in the form of the road which one treads, which has different names for different people: among them are: the 'Good red road, the dream time path, earth walk, and pipe way." Breath is an important notion, it is the means by which the external world is taken into the individual and transformed into her/his energy, a part of his essence and her/his functioning. It also represents one of the living rhythms. And so one shaman interviewed enacts rituals with pipe smoke, whose trajectories represents a sort of cosmic breath, the personal individual essence mixing or merging in strange patterns with the eternal cosmic essence.

To understand the principle of the Native threshold experience is imagining a two dimensional spiral to be a three dimensional helix. Just as the path of migration moves upward in space, a spiral cycle is eventually completed. Unlike the closure that is eventually brought by a circle, however, the path remains to be in juxtaposition to a major axis. This juxtaposition indicates that the clan has not simply completed a circle, but in the process of its experiential journey, its collective mind has been transformed or elevated to a higher ideological level of consciousness. Paradoxically therefore, the clan returns to the same place of origin or coordinate of one of the three axes, thus in the sense of an elevated transformational space.

The spiral dynamic has been likened to a whirlwind vortex. With movement comes not only enlightenment, but a force that ultimately results in adaptation and change in the community. Because of state capitalism and the confinement of Ntive Americans to reservations, Native identity therefore no longer exists in a space time and place continuum. Rather, experiential or transformational learning no longer is the motivation for change. The most cynical observers of this change will point out that Native people who have no understanding of the meaning of their collective actions are simply "playing Indian." At least, the goal of indigenous planning is not just to reinforce cultural identity, but to challenge the community into understanding how the past and the present serve to give coherence to the future.

In the sixth chapter, Gender binaries, Waters indicates that non-discrete gender binaries, which exist in Native culture and imaginings, signal continuity, not discontinuity or separation. They exhibit fluidity. Something being A and another thing being not A could still be the same, cocontiguous or overlapping. However in the EuroAmerican perception, two categories such as "A"and "not A" could never be the same. Humpty Dumpty is the term used to refer to the separation between mind and body, abstract unchanging truth and the material universe which is always changing, the egg that fell from the wall to the floor and cracked, never to be put together again, that signified these splits that occurred in Western Philosophy, namely the "form versus content, intellect versus matter" debate in Platonic discourse.

Similarly, the clergy of the middle ages ignored the material reality of the poor and spent their days communicating with their personal Gods, remaining separate from the material or bodily or health concerns of others, even as they consumed more food and other resources. But they were supposedly exonerated from blame because of their so-called spiritual preoccupation or vocation. Waters states that Native American thought would have had no patience with such a social dissonance or disconnectedness of spiritual leaders from the people they were meant to serve.

In contrast to modern hegemonic capitalist society which tends to fear and other cross dressers or transmen, transwomen, in Native American society, so called "manly hearted women" were considered blessed or gifted. If a woman decided she wanted to lead a hunting party, or assemble or fix weapons such as bows, arrows and spears, she was considered to be divinely endowed with bravery and the desire to protect and provide for the people of her birth.

Both reciprocity and confluence between physical or nutritional and social environments seems to be a characteristic of Mongolian and Siberian Cultures. This is in contrast to the systematically exploitative and non-reciprocal relationship Euro American society has with the livestock it keeps for slaughter, which are kept in cramped seldom cleaned pens or cages, where animals are jam packed against each-other with little freedom to move, run, walk or stretch, in other words, rather than being allowed to forage for their own food freely, they are kept locked up without dignity, the four walls of the cage the only thing they see until the time of their death.

By contrast, for example, in Alaskan Eskimo Society, the meat extracted or culled from the animal herds that are hunted by the men, is returned in the form of exposing the bodies of dead human relatives to the ravages of the elements, and more importantly, to the consumption of scavengers such as bears, wolverines, lynxes, jaguars and coyotes. Similarly in Mongolia, the offspring of wild animals, such as hawks or eagles, are taken in and raised as a member of the family, and these young birds accompany the humans on hunting trips. In Mongolian culture a second practice attempting to construct a kind of metaphysical reciprocity is the making of small dolls representing animals, called *ongon* in the Mongol language, which act as intermediaries with the forest spirit and persuade this spirit to allow good hunting to the men that venture out into the woods for that purpose. Women welcome such small wooden figurines representing these spirits into their homes, smearing them with animal fat and blood to keep them happy and nourished. It is through these rituals that the Mongolian hunting people express their feelings of gratitude towards the animals they hunt, and ensure the continuity of the dynamic spiritual realm of tag and catch, chase or stalk and spear, and that the spirits of the animals they catch are invited courteously into their homes to live and interact with its members.

In order to deflect possibilities of the family of the animal one has hunted form taking revenge on the hunter and his tribe, the hunter uses cunning, loudly proclaiming, for example, that a member of another tribe is responsible for the death of the animal he himself has killed, or better still, to preserve his own anonymity while chasing the poor animal, the hunter may wear a mask. In both Siberia and in North America, hunters show moderation in the amount that they catch, they also hide or conceal their intentions, avoiding taking the name of their quarry aloud to their companions, and use code words or euphemisms to refer to their kill.

Both in Siberian and in North American hunting societies, after the flesh is eaten or removed from the bones, proper care must be taken to treat the consumed animal's remains, and for the same reasons or beliefs: that life persists as long as the bones remain, so the bones and the genital organs are kept in the forest upon a raised platform, and this assures that its soul will come back to the common stock of its species, and thereby bring about the birth of another individual of its species. Because the bodily envelope of flesh is considered as a mere appearance, a temporary clothing that can be regained or reconstituted from the life containing frame of the bones, the hunter has therefore in theory not actually destroyed the animal, but has simply appropriated its flesh in order to eat it and be nourished. Also, before being deposited into the forest, the animal's skull must be taken into the hunter's home and installed or situated in the place of honour. Relatives and neighbours are

invited for the ceremony, and a party is organised in honour of the animal's soul. The celebration includes a ceremonial thanks to the animal's soul for feeding the people, and the animal is encouraged to return among its fellows in order to persuade them too to visit the human beings.

In these practices we see a glaring contrast between Native American culture and thought and Western or European derived systems of thought, constituting what the editor Jerry Manders called "Paradigm Wars", the titular phrase of his book. While tribal thought is given to reciprocity among beings, moderation in consumption and continuity and growth of all relationships, including philosophical development of the tribe or family through collective transcendental experience, European thought is fixed on optimization and maintenance of power relations between human beings and nature they use, exploit, produce and consume in such quantities that much wastage occurs and the stock is ravaged, as well as the assumption that these components of nature cannot really feel pain or anguish as humans do, when in the so called 'tribal' reality animals and plants have just as much spiritual and feeling capacity as humans do.

Yasinia, standing like a flame, her limbs caramel and lemon, like ingredients thrown into a fire with wild dried grass to spark, her tunic hued black and purple, her veil studded with stars. Like ivory and cardamom, like curds and wheat, like honey and butter, she stood, her eyes glowing like jewels.

How shall we explain to heathens the bulk of our religion? We do things collectively so no one is left out. We eat from the same bowl so that we understand one another's rhythms and there are no schisms, and we bow down together as well. Worship and sustenance both occur in company so that the glory of the day and the fear of our lord are shared among our brethren, showing there is nothing to hide and nothing that anyone has that others should take away.

On the other hand, black marks are made with kohl on the cheek of the child to ward off evil, in case any neighbour wishes to steal some of the lords' blessings from him.

Samaira lifted the doorpoles, her shoulders straining and her back bending, using the thrust of the centre of her weight to catapult them upwards. Then Tehzeeb bent them into arches, tying them together with hemp chord, Samaira took a knife and carved in the ground amid the gathering dusk, the circles for the poles to dock into.

Tehzeeb placed each of the curving poles into the slots, crossing the arched ends at the pinnacle or the zenith with one another, completed the frame like ribs from a wild goats' skeleton.

Samaira sat weaving the jerkins that were to be worn by the herders in the chilly dawn, indigo and blocks forded by yellow canary string, evergreen pine needles and cranberries to dot the flowers sown in brocade of the blue sky of the prairie. She said she had in her plans a sacred carpet for holding in balance the world's dangers, never to rise and engulf human beings unknowingly. She thought of the factories of which Sheila had told her that had had explosions – the Bhilai sail steel plant which had killed 11 workers, and injured others, the second accident in four years in the same place. The company had said it would stand by the families off the deceased, but what that meant, and how they would do so, still remained unclear.

But one thing Sheila had noticed was that, ever since her brother had gone to the city to work, Samaira had displayed a sudden interest in reading and writing, in arithmetic and science. She said she wanted to grow up to be a technician or a safety engineer, who would ensure the correct workings of manufacturing equipment.

Let's not talk down to children and students all the time, let's try to understand where they're coming from, stand in their shoes a little. Then we will be able to meet them at a mutually respectful middle ground. Not a truce, but a collaboration a combination to extract the best from both sides and make both sides stronger as a result.

"Write about small things, and see what you find that way. Big ideas can come from small things. In many ways, the simple folk have much to teach the mainstream. Lessons of thrift, of seeing matters

through, of loyalty despite poverty, of helping the downtrodden neighbor, of cooperation, of hard work and prayer.

Avan and Wajma. They are your friends. Now we must go work in the school.

A chittering, chattering pan of light

Stirred with spoons on a fire

A swirling bowl of milk and water

On a stove or a spit. We really need the principle of sharing,

Because otherwise there may be hoarding

And we may become arbitrary and unfair,

And we want to be there for all.

My Grandmother, was a stalwart woman, with sinews trained by scores of years of pulling the luggage of passengers, who were not strong enough to carry their own possessions by themselves. Though she had less than each of them, she could carry twice the weight of the average suitcase at a time. She was like the typical savage woman, who carried all her family's belongings and tilled the field without the help of a brave.

The value of care for others, lending one's strength to help out, unselfishness, freedom from greed, and the nourishment of one's spiritual strength are themes that stand out from one's readings of Atacama's life.

"When analysed, it was found that an average Native American Woman's bone structure salvaged twice as much muscular strength and mass as a European man."

Beware of the folly of reading about philosophies you wish to master but are not willing to embody, as that could be a morally culpable activity.

We working women take care of our own families, but we also take care of others' families. We wash, we iron, we cook and we clean, and if it's all totted up to housekeeping, do you see, if the nation could be run or have come this far without our help. So make the most of what we give you through our work, work hard and see that it brings returns, not just for you, but for us.

But don't forget to see what the casting thimble of light throws you, what sparkling colourful thread, or spinning, feathered rainbows of watery bubbles, of watered springtime, of hallowed pines and growing hawthorn, bursting its band of moss, bent over with the weight of the westerly wind.

Chapter 9. Drifting Ahead

Sheila wrote in her "words for travel" notebook a device that ensured that she, a poor teacher who would never have the means to go to distant lands, could still allow her imagination and fancy to wander: "Native American and African American Women are among the most beautiful and industrious women on earth. They work multiple jobs, as waitresses, security guards, shop-girls and telephone operators, professors, teachers and healers and they are among the most entrepreneurial, because they perform creative and caring work in their free time irrespective of what job they otherwise perform.

Some, living on reservations, expand their world through the use of needle, thread and thimble and loom, weaving bolts of cotton with a lightning pattern, yellow, red and black, stripes of these colours running cross wise against the length of the cloth, like a candy-cane snake's moultings, building the boundaries of multiple worlds, for the shirts of their men, and the shawls of their women.

Lately, those who have sought to better their economic opportunities by travelling across the Mexican border to the United States, have been wrested from their homes by the lure of development which should have occurred where they were from but did not through inefficient governance, had their children wrested from their arms, all in the name of legalizing immigration by a fool in the American Government.

Charla, separated from her mother at the age of eight, with her brother Mundin, crying and wailing and screaming … Running up and down the detention center barefoot, calling out for her parents. Her brother joins her, toddling up and down behind her. They bang at the walls and the windows to be let out, until the staff comes in whirling sticks and frowns. Then breathing hard and exhausted the two children Charla and Mundin sit themselves down on the cold floor, to endure yet another day of listening to others crying, forbidden by the staff to hug children who were upset or crying.

What greater dissonance from the human spirit than to prevent the exchange of affection among strangers when separation and suffering occur in families? What 'civilized' impudence to assume that alliances will not be forged subverting these restrictions? And how many times will the same thing repeat itself down the centuries, first the mission schools into which stolen Indian children were enrolled, forbidden to speak the language of their birth or to worship native gods? And why must the human race witness such ignorance and unwillingness to understand divergent peoples? We have not forgotten the colour of the soil with which we used to play when we were infants, the same colour as our working hands, from which our mothers would lead us home and care for us. And not forgetting that we are the same colour as the soil, the same soil that feeds us, and that is our best plaything or toy, or companion even, we will remember our parents and our parentage, those who carried us on their backs as they gathered wild manioc and leaves for the bark paste preparation.

They wear their hair in braids down their backs, or in tight knotted buns at the backs of their heads, fringed leathern dresses and many necklaces of shells, stones and beads, and sometimes copper earrings to be tassels dangling upon their stretched earlobes.

Their eyes are dark and luminous, like deer's eyes, gazing at reflective lakes at which they bend to drink. Their slender but sturdy frames resemble the corn mother goddess, who grows in graceful green calm maize-crops, swaying in the West wind. Their noses are like the arched beak of the eagle, diving and spinning for its prey, and their hair is black as night and straight as the flight of the raven's wings with its glossy pitch plumage outstretched like posses of knives.

This woman was nursing her child as she gathered berries.

The fruit tree, growing reddish brown yellow leaves circling in and around the wounds from fallen mangoes rejuvenating the tall shrub that had borne fruit in a short, tumbling summer, now wet by monsoon gusts, rains and winds.

The sky above, grey, peacock blue, sfumato, grumbling with gathering clouds milling like an orchestra of thunder and hawk-like shapes, storks, descending in flocks, their feathers like arrows spearing wheat through the heavens, piercing the fabric of the sky, railing upon the earth, raising plumes and towers of dust and fumes.

A rainbow hued thunderbird, with feathers hanging from its wings like tassels, fringes, combing the air as it soars, sweeping and brushing the branches of the oaks, delineating a kingdom from the shadow of its flight.

Its song is sweeter and more desolate than a nightingale's, more resplendent than a condor's, tells of the joys of brothers and sisters playing in the ruins of Machu Pichu, playing hopscotch and house in the abandoned terraces and scurrying up and down scrubbed staircases, its song is like an Andean flute, breathy and searing, rearing and wheedling like a charmed snake's hood swaying above a basket.

And it blesses the infants, whose cheeks it strokes with its feathers, and whose blankets it carries, nanny-like, in its beak for clouds, and finally, its cry shatters the barrage of nimbus that has crept, like a foreboding witch's hand, and brings the sudden peal of rain. For these reasons, do women hallow the thunderbird.

Teeth of hail, windows of snowflakes,

Rattling upon the trunks of trees, streaking their bark with ice.

Brides veils of rain, bouquets of thunder,

The stamping of a flamenco dancer throwing hurls of fire from her clawed, hibiscus-like, tightly curling hands,

A lost child, gazing and gazing at the dancer as though she were her mother, as she stamps

Upon the hard, dirt packed floor, which resounds with echoes and screams of her heels

Lightning like bolting earrings, babies in slings, stirring in the wind like opal stirring windchimes, or like swings

Or scallop shells chattering in a galaxy of hanging

Limpets, from a cedar wood and rushes thatching the ceiling of a meeting lodge,

A curl of knotted hair, pulled from a brush,

Turning and tangling like an eddy, a whirlpool,

A tornado, a thrush's nest

That Dickon said never would be betrayed.

The grey sky pouring down upon the thirsty earth, washing the tree leaves clean of dust and smoke, slanting storms and wheedling, winnowing winds. Trees waving, shuddering. Affronted birds, hiding beneath branches, their feathers ruffled and quivering, cheeping, swallowing, guttering, hiding it out until the tempest passes.

A girl standing among them with no umbrella. A cheap, fake diamond in her nostril, flashing at times. She walks forward on the path, leaning into the wind. A stork crosses her path, flying, careening towards her and then bends away, like a kite that was hanging from a banyan tree and quivering off in the wind.

"O dear bird," she said, seeing its wing was cut with kite-string. Its wings fluttered feebly, as she caught hold of it. Not mincing steps, she ran towards the hospital ward. "Nurse," she said to one of the sisters, "I found this creature injured on my morning walk. We must do ought for it."

The nurse administered antiseptic while the girl administered pain killer. And now, said the nurse, we must remove the evil string. They unwrapped it from the wing of the stork carefully, exposing the abrasion.

This is a metaphor for people unaware of Satan and the evil he works in people who do not heed the danger nor the commandments of the Lord. He works evil in the world, sowing doubt, delay, greed, sloth, lust, anger, hatred and disobedience, and its residues lie abroad in it, in the people and their worries, lying in wait to entrap and consume anyone who is not firmly rooted in the Way. Compassion, humility and frugality, seasoned with prayer, penance, fasting and scripture reading, along with charity and labour are its jewels. Those who follow these things, forging a narrow path for themselves, will find their lives again, but those who allow themselves to be lead into traps against their instinct, or who do not allow their gut feeling to guide them, nor the power of love to lead them, to forge their own destinies, they are the ones who fall victim to oblivion, are made short work of by the devil's handiwork. And so be thou wary.

A shining moonbeam, a gleaming eye painted upon the cheek of the Bedouin woman who now paints eyes on the cheek of every child that passes, to ward off evil, a veil of night. A lotus upon the ripples, peacefully rests, upon the cresting waves.

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She says: "Just imagine and realise that everyone is a child of God. Everyone who was born upon this earth, is loved by their mother and father and God, even if the child could not later live with his family, due to financial hardships faced by the parents."

Hence, whenever you interact with another person, maintain respect and love for them, so that the child who was looked after by its parents, is not injured, hurt or mortified.

Ezmeralda, clad in a green and purple dress, dancing on the street and walking across the balancing beam. She lifts her leg to graze her ear, and leaps and spins, soaring above the beam like a swan, and landing like a stork on the floor below. She bends to pick up the broken flowers, carnations, violets and chrysanthemums, strewn across the path, and gathers them to form a bouquet, which she then divides among the many watching children.

Stars and banners, rags and sores, glitter and perfume, among the many peasants and indeed gentry watching the performance, many will try out the steps at home, for the steps galvanise their fancy and make them yearn for liberty, burning arcs of lava spewing from a volcano in their hearts, a firebird's flight emblazoned upon the sky like a comet in their gaze.

But it is the beggars, the tinkerers, and those who roam the streets, like she has, that have truly mastered the finer points of the art.

For they live by the goodwill of the sun, and the drink of the planets, and the meal of the stars, that is cast off bread and garbage vegetables, begging and wheedling for sides of cheese, and thus their very pert walk is a dance of gratitude to the Lord and to the universe.

And what do they do with their energy from food and in their spare time? They sweep the street, wash clothes from the public wells, and practice spinning on their blocked heeled shoes, arms flying outwards like eagle's wings, screeching and screaming like the kites in flight.

They leap like storks alighting on rocks, they stamp like ducks chattering, and run like ibises, their hearts pumping like water cisterns. And when they are done, they sew and embroider their scarves with blue and red thread, taken from the scrap tailor's refuse heap, they sew metal discs on their tambourines, which they have beaten into musical shape from the copper coins they found in horse's hoofprints, and hammered into hollows by the heat of the smithy fire, and the shape of the tin bowl. Or, they string their violins, carved from fragrant and mellow wood and strung with horsehair to be played with gentle bows, to coax the sweet tunes from them, like streams of molasses, for a few coins.

It is not well to live by such uncertainty alone, said Esmeralda, these gypsy children should be taught squarely to read and write, and add up numbers, so that they can know streets for delivery of merchandise and at least work in a shop, when they are grown up.

"But aiming low never did do us, much good," Sheila intervened. "Let's teach them to read so that they can reimagine themselves and their worlds, shaping their own futures, manipulating their environments and influencing their surroundings. To string words in a poem to one's satisfaction, is to reconfigure one's soul from the rags of drudgery to the crags of exaltation.

And it is that we seek a freedom driven and structured by the rules of art and of discipline, of mastery over some skill and its profession for one's contribution to society."

"Thus, I will work with you," said Ezmeralda to Sheila, "To bring our dreams to fruition. Teaching our children to dance while you teach them their letters, we will make a good team."

I for one will quote Rumi, "The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you.

Don't go back to sleep.

You must ask for what you really want.

Don't go back to sleep.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill

Where the two worlds touch.

The door is round and open.

Don't go back to sleep."

And if when you have watched many mornings, and toiled many days, your body bruised with the curses of those who bleed you dry with their exploitation, let us band together, after you have learned to share your burdens.

I will soothe you and heal you, I will bring you salves.

I too, have been covered with thorns."

You have understood my meaning, the path of learning is a path of thorns.

We sit, and read, and do sums and survey the terrors of the valleys

While our mothers do more work than we have ever known.

The way of love is not a subtle argument.

The door there is devastation.

Birds make great sky circles

Of their freedom:

How do they learn it?

They fall; and falling, they're given wings.

That was how our mothers managed everything.

But he also says,

Doing as others told him,

I was blind.

Coming when others called me,.

I was lost.

Then I left everyone,

Myself as well.

Then I found everyone,

Myself as well."

Esmeralda opened her satchel and handed out a pad of blank paper a paintbox, paintbrush and a palette with a water bowl to each child.

Sickle moons give so much light
Branches tangle in-front and fight
Guilded with silver,
bathed in moonlight
A path across the field
Crossed and laden with raspberries
Whose skin, hard, encapsulates
Fruit tiny piled upon each-other like
Pine cone's structure, or pagodas
Through the mists of marshes

Or custard apple
Spider's webs woven like looms of silk or canvas
Dreamcatchers hanging in the trees' willowy branches.
Silent, slow and creeping

Always, a picking out of light
In the hillside as one stands
At the top of the flight of steps,
Sure legged antelope, deer, grazing, looking
With mountain goats, sure of their footing
Grazing or chewing upon a strand
Of sweetgrass or clover,
or the braids of wild wheat or rice varieties
Satisfied for the morning with the clear sky, deep shivering blue
A bowl overturned on the earth
Beset with stars
A crown of radiance and brilliance
One feels the thrill of the well fed feeling
Rise within oneself,
Rising of the spirit of the earth,
Chattering in the screaming
Of bulbuls and sparrows
As they court and gather and peek
At their seeds and little plum fruits
Squirels shattering the frozen ice glass of the morning
Like woodpeckers would shatter
A chrystal window pane,
or a door alike with its insistent jabbing.

The squirrels stop.
The rain drops
The earth's soil sops.
And the bunds of fallen leaves stand firm stretching
Branches and cut grass hold in the soil
Which would have otherwise melted away, flowing in brown
Tea-coloured rivers out of the fields
In the richness of burnt sienna
Coffee or ginger Assam tea,
Wrung with toil
Or of chocolate eclairs bought in a shop
With their gold and purple wrappers
Chewed by school children in their after-noon classes.
The arbours of eucalyptus on the margins of the farms,
sway and toss and nearly topple, their soft
green leaves turning like windmills
Their seedpods scattering, pesticide
Their trunks scratched and patched
With teak brown and beige-white
Telling of a peeling bark that is stark
And a quilt-work of wind ravaged and frayed tunic.
An ascetic's cassock and hood, readied
And washed and bathed, and from the tempest worn.

Sleeps unaware of a clarion call
The stems and buds and thorns rising like a rosebush
To paint the sky with scratches

And with raining blood
Of martyrs, comforted by mystics
Who hold up the world through a cross of nails
The ones who go on autopilot without thinking, planning, or feeling
But listen to the algorithms as if to music,
But do not sing along
Will be questioned
But those who blaze a path ahead with their own filaments and nerves
Paths of neurons and bloodvessels and folds of the brain
Unearthing the love from within
And living breathing, working by that,
Will bear along the others,
And everyone will be fine that-aways.

"Developing the aesthetic sensibilities of children is of prime importance to their sense of morality and spirituality, bolstering them along life, training them to make their own path, their own opinions, their own loyalties. When children learn to both appreciate, create, and understand, different environment s and different kinds of beauty, they are able to pause and appreciate family, social and work situations for their inner meanings, what they mean individually to the children themselves on their own divinely inspired and self-created life path, and journeys of discovery, so that they treat all others with love, not just because they should, but because they cannot help doing so, because being in harmony with others is essential to their own happiness, so that they can continue to observe beauty in art and architecture, they come across and are inspired to create. Their lives will be secure and the temptation to crime or sin will stay far from them. This leads to a world in which the mystery which turns the gyres of their limbs and they bay and gallop according to the tides of their own blood, reigns supreme, sometimes even being in heaven on earth."

One girl painted a sea borne scene with a blue and purple horizon with flamingo pink clouds, an orange setting sun, and double decked ships, with sharp and rounded, large white sails, and rowers, dipping their oars into the waving, foamy water, heaving their vessels forwards like arrows through the waves.

Another teenage girl painted laundry-women (their mothers) washing and beating the household clothes and curtains against the rinsing stone, strewn with suds and pouring soap bubbles frothed from lye and blue bar 'Rin' industrial soap to get the stains out. Their black hair flowed onto their backs, tangled and dividing like glossy raven's wing feathers, curling, and leaving trails of dampness on their white cotton kaftans that stuck to their hard-working backs.

A teenage boy painted a forest clearing, with horses, llamas and goats grazing on the weeds and grassy furze emerging from fairy haunted pebbles on the ground, that perhaps Hansel had scattered there to remind himself and his sister Gretl of their way home. The canopy of trees was yellow gold and green, and through the air flew orange and amber leaves floating down the stair of the wind, like showers of sparks from a green wooded bonfire blowing hither and thither in the wind.

When some business men objected to their setting up a school for urchins on one of the cleaner streets, they said, "Not self-created, but self-destroyed is he, who bends to other Gods than he who fashioned him out of a clot of blood. Worship not the false God of classism and racism too, might I add."

"Children are our future, and in order to learn they need to be away from filth, away from smell, away from the reminders of their destitution, so that they can build a different future for themselves and each-other.

I can understand the faces of men, in some way similar to the way that God understands what is in men's hearts. He has given me that power.

Cursed be they who pay no heed to women's words whom they deem not comely.

For those women within, may be more discerning, and ignoring them when they speak wise words will lead to ruin.

Hast thou seen a hollow pitcher that bellows when struck? Even so is the lot of men who ignore the words of underprivileged women whom they deem not comely. Make the choice, the choice is yours, how you wish to be arrayed on the day of judgement, whether like a chidden train or like an angel in dignity."

One day after a lesson with gypsy children whose mothers worked as domestic servants, Esmeralda said to Sheila: Let me tell you of one of my friends who worked as a servant in a well to do household, and how she struggled with her work and her friends and her boss-mistress.

"Rizwana, the gypsy girl was slender, long boned; with long hair and flowers pinned up in it. Her day went thus: She walked towards her mistress' front door, ritually graced it with sacred images made by her fingers of daffodils and hyacinths, and opened it, fingering the rough edges with her thin hands. She traipsed to the dining room and kitchen to prepare lunch for the family who worked outside in the city away from the suburbs. The whole house was hollow and empty, so she stood a moment in front of the tall arched windows and gazed out at the olive trees and mountains, turned on the spot then walked to the sink which had running water, unlike in her caravan, which had a tub and a drain and forced her to wash dishes in a stream in the open sunshine, and was stacked with dishes from the previous day and the morning present, and began to attack it with a scrubber and soap, kneading it in and out of the hollows and sines, slippery, scudding and graceful, the water running all the time. Coming from a place of scarcity, where water had to be cadged from a brook, she did not like to waste it, and so she straightened the flow and used the trickle instead.

The ceiling was around five feet above her black bobbed head, the sink was at her waist, and the window at her elbow. She tied the curtains round their middle and swept them to the side of their slats so that the light slanted golden and beaming like the wings of an angel with its spun hair spreading down a spiralling ladder of Jacob, twisting and turning a thousand times like the horn of a unicorn.

She was hungry and so she took, from the stack of flatbread she had prepared the day before, a roll and dipped it in oval-tine milk. Her mistress had not told her she could eat there if she was hungry, but she figured if the food was there and she could work no further without eating something, she must partake of it then. Still chewing, she gathered the bucket in her two arms, holding on to its handles tightly.

She finished the washing and then leaned into the drawer to retrieve some vegetables from below the kitchen platform, to cook, finding some aubergines, a potato, lady fingers and some onions and she laid them out and hacked at them crosswise, throwing them into a pan with some oil and cumin, and stir frying them as though in a wok for her mistress. Rizwana put a lid on so that they would steam while she washed the clothes and the water would be retained so they would not burn.

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She took off her workaday shoes and donned the heeled sandals for the dancing, and the stamping; she shrugged off her shawl and placed a sprig of fresh jasmine in her chignon, added a ruffle to her skirt, tied up her red and green sash and then she was set. She stepped out of the door of her caravan demurely and scanned the horizon for the rest of her tribe coming home on foot or on horseback from the day in the town.

She moved like a lark her arms swirling and writhing like the wings of an eagle curving on air, two hands chasing one another in the wind. She stamped like one possessed, chattering on the ground in a dreadful tattoo like horses conjuring thunder on the stone lined hills, like a dragon roaring fire or like a board shattering. Jean, her boyfriend and she, they partnered each other like galloping deer, twisting and turning like torrents of a water fall, running after their own tails.

She stood next to him before asking, how was your day? He said, well, I got hungry in the morning and had to ask my employer if I could eat some of his oatmeal stored up in the cupboard and felt ashamed, but after that I felt good and could carry on well." Rizwana made note of the meeting in

their fates, as her face was turned to him in pity. He continued, "I served the first customer a café au lait with a croissant and lemon, and the second customer a side of toast with butter and sardines, for that was on our breakfast menu, and my they eat better than we will ever eat, the second tipped me handsomely a full ten francs, here it is, I will save it apart from the rest."

She stood with Jean at the caravan door, beneath the saddle reigns of starlight, shining down like gemstones cast from the mantle of the ebony night, fingered his rough shoulder blade with her palm, let it loose like the bridle of an Arab mare, slipping from the head of the thoroughbred creature. He slipped into her arms like a shirt slipping onto a torso, pale despite his blood, blanched by work and worn with weariness.

"And how about your day, Rizwana?' he asked her of her experiences, running his hand through her hair which was jet black like the starry obsidian of the sky, unlike his which was alternately the colour of sparks, an autumn bonfire and mahogany branches burning up within it, strawberry blonde in the sunlight and bright as a nightingale in the evening-time.

"Fair," she said, the blood jading her dark cheeks like wine. "And good. "I fed a family and returned home to feed my own. I walked along the railway tracks shortly after the dawning and cleaned their house, washed their utensils, and got back here in the afternoon to make my own caravan spick and span, and to have my own drought of rest.

I rubbed hands with rabbits, moles and mice burrowing on the sides of the railway tracks, caught grass seeds and burrs in my running stockings that I will have to mend." Rizwana sat herself down on the steps of her caravan and pulled some hay out of the ground, sat it on her lap and twirls it between her thumbs. Then she stood, fetched a bucket and filled it to the brim with stacks of hay tied up with hemp chord and grass strings, combined it with an apple to give to Monsieur Quesnay, Jean's horse. "Here, dear," she said softly. "Chew this up." Jean's horse looked at her through gentle black eyes and nuzzled her face before taking the hay into his crooked teeth. His eyes reflected the clouds and storms brewing in the sky, like lakes churning under impending tempests, river's glissades cascading over rocky drops and dips, and moonlight flashing on dashing waves at a wild seashore.

"Some are always grateful if you feed them, at least," said Jean, lowering his head.

"Do you think you are treated with respect at your job, Jean?"

"Yes", he said. "As long as I earn it."

"You mean you don't earn it just by turning up?" she asked.

"Well, there's something called spotless service," he said, his kind, drawn face looking down at her didactically. "How quickly I get to the customer's table, whether I get their orders down exact, how well I deliver it to them. What about you? Do you feel you're treated with respect?"

'Fair enough," said Roxana. "Although they don't allow me to eat there if I am hungry."

"They don't? Then I shall give you money if you are hungry."

"If I need money I don't want it from you."

'Then from whom will you get it?" he asked, simply.

"My employers," she said with determination. "I work with my back for them, and if they don't, I'll take in more washing."

A shadow passed over Jean's face, as it did sometimes when it was mentioned that his job earned him less than it should. "You'll wear yourself thin," he said. She got the picture of him, a man who did not want to believe the world was unfair, thinking merely that his own integrity, pulled and culled from his hard, severe work, could right it.

"As if you're not already," Roxana put her arm around his skeletal shoulders. "I've got a plan. All the maids that work in the neighbourhood they have families, two three children each, we speak often, daily, and they're all saying it's impossible to make ends meet on what we're being given."

Jean blinked, shaking his head. Roxana could see a tear. "I'll support you. I'll support your requests. Even if it could cost us our jobs, are you willing to consider that?"

Roxana covered her face with her hands. "Don't talk like that, Jean… do not. I am trying to improve things for us, not to wreck them …"

"And that is why I am proud," he finished, as more often than not, they finished each other's sentences.

Jean was a poet in his spare time, and composes couplets in praise of the woods and this girl, Rizwana.

A raven's wing, black as my lady's eyes, telling me to be one my way, seeking work from the town near the skies, the colour of her dress, the blue egg of the robin, telling me not to weep though I leave for work in a distant realm …

"Have you ever wondered, Jean, what it would be if there was school in our language Romani?"

Jean resisted, then said, "Oh, the wonderful writing, the words shining on the page like moonbeams and shade, clear as pearl, crisp as leaf, burning in the incense of myrrh."

And she said "Jean, Land, imagine if we had land," her eyes shining like stars. "And imagine if Princes tilled it. Because you are a prince. Imagine if you tilled your land."

"I am not a Prince."

"I say, you are."

"No, don't do that, I don't know how to behave as a prince."

"You are more princely than princes."

"You like to make of me a fool."

"No, Jean, listen, we're gods and we must take it. It's pouring down like honey, like rain. We could be gods if we simply realized it."

"Which gods?" he cocked his head.

"The ones we want to be," she said.

"And what do these gods do, play havoc in the lives of mortals?"

"Opals and mud, scallops and sand, windchimes in the water, mermaid's hair, flowing like seaweed in a current of the wake of a ship. Waves surging, foaming like stallions' manes, like flecks from its teeth, bared against the bit, reigning in its run.

Marram wild against the dunes, shrubs high and shocking, thorny, budded, blooming with flowers gladly in the sun.

"How Gods? Said Jean walking quickly, his breath stealing speed, to keep pace with her. "How do you mean that we be Gods?

"The snake God, whose voice is like thunder, whose speech like the rattle, skin like rainclouds in the sky, or like ash smeared over his cheeks and throat, sequestering the poison of a serpent. His hair is tangled with the waters of the great river, whose flow it staunches for human succour. A snake rears from his crown."

His counterpart rises like the hills of the horizon, demure and dutiful, rosy like the dawn and pure like mountain air. She drapes her scarf crosswise to cover her parted hair, black as night.

"See, Jean, the other teaches us something about who we are, who we can be. It is in the picking out of burrs from our sleeves, in the shrugging of our shoulders and the hugging of ourselves that we incite others to want to know how that feels. For before we hug ourselves, it is the desire to hug the other that causes us to love ourselves, that then teaches us we must love and be content with ourselves alone first. The desire to know intimately something different, something we have stumbled across, but seems to have been what we were preparing for, being trained to balm, what seems to have been calling for us all along like a shipwrecked sailor, a parched soldier calling out for water."

"This is how beggars talk. It's not always about you sharing," said Rizwana. "I would like to share with you. You may be strong but, I'm strong too. I can lift buckets on a pole strung slantwise/crosswise across my shoulders. I can lift them to my waist in my clenched fist, and carry them a mile, two. I can walk three, run four, elbows like levers at a well, stalk up stairs like a monkey rappelling up a coconut tree, a fairy tern up a cypress, a butterfly up the gangway of a cathedral.

I can cook to put smiles on faces, wash to create clean lives, can lead people from lost lives to found ones, from desolation to belonging in the great human community. To bring them to see the melting beauty of the moss, lichens, and blue green algae, the shivering dusk of the shaking trees and the fading of the sunset, the clamouring of the stones in the brook, the wind's paint of dried leaves against the sky, until they want to find its origins so badly that they weep, and henceforth work hard and are kind for the rest of their lives."

"When someone pays me my due or tips me," said Jean, speaking for himself, "You can be sure I'll watch their back forever, praying for them always. The thing is, we folk work so hard with our bodies, that they must needs receive a blessing if they have given to us. "

"Or if they cast in their lot with us."

"But even more if they speak. Sometimes, if you speak, or if you hear speech, your heart is filled and it is as good as any payment. So let it be between you and me. Dear Rizwana," he said gazing into her filling eyes, "When I have real need, I shall take from you, and I hope you will not deny me in return."

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"Girl, sing," said Jean. "And I will listen and play my drum and stamp in place. He stood and pattered his feet in time to the rhythms of her canto, the wild, swinging, rhythmic, lost, shaking the hanging bells of her tambourine to adorn her pain.

It was the swaying canto of a wending life, demure and skirting, one that stepped in time among the seasons, thrusting its workday from east to west, chasing the rest of God, finding that rest in the flowing of water, and in the flight of the sky's mausoleum, which let loose a cage of dreams, dreams which could flow with their arms outspread like eagles or exultant maidens, singing in a passion of their beloved Apollo, girls who turned into sunflowers to follow him and then into girls back again. It was a life where one day meant more than the future, and where that day counted for everything.

Behold, he spins and the fringes of the epaulets of his tribal coat go flying out in all directions, like dust from the wheels of a wheelbarrow, his heartbeats plummet like a hummingbird, speaking and chattering, diving into the heart of a gladiolus to sip its nectar.

She takes the lyre and lets the wind play on it, bringing forth a drifting music, to balm the rage of her singing, to mellow it, like the breeze caressing the neck feathers of a foundling cuckoo or crow.

O, voice of the bee's buzzing, honey deep, their drone in the pith of the morning, spreading like wings in the temple of the world's sacredness, strumming the song of intelligence of all things, of wakefulness, of compassion, immortal, un-finishing. Bird, sing, to the East and to the West, and may the cage of thy frame be the confluence of friendship between them.

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Last night as I lay dreaming, of pleasant days gone by.

And someone singed the collars

As I stirred the lentils green

And I said the smoke arising

Is as bad as a house in flame

And who shall give the clothes in return

For the blame I'm sure to get?

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"It was first that I saw you as a stranger, you with a penchant for walking barefoot in the autumn cold in the parks, in the suburbs, in the wilderness outskirts of the city, who neither smoked nor drank like some wanderers do, but kept your hair long and braided and tangled like a Rastafarian from that country they call the Carribbean, to which some of our compadres have sailed for. Your hobby, your pastime was physical work and your labour was your hobby. Your intoxication was the eternal truth, the unchanging reality that is at once dynamic, and is understood by the true seeker and warriors of good, of the light within the darkness of the body, of navigation among the storms of maya, which at once uses the arts and wiles of illusion to entrap lovers of the truth, who give their lives to deciphering and embodying it.

Within a day or two we realized we shared a common experience, that of being regular workers in the food services. I visited your restaurant just to see you, how you worked, and saw that you were always strict, strict about people ordering seconds, and about people coming in near closing time."

Jean said, "At the boulangerie, I saw your sister who worked there sitting with her girlfriend at the breakfast table behind the kitchen, just soaking up and revelling in her girlfriend's care. She seemed so withdrawn, as though the only way to draw her out was to be under the protection of that girl. It reminded me kind of like how I am with you.

It steeped me in such a beautiful feeling, to see them together," Jean said. "I really believe those other folks should have their rights as well. Why not? They love and strive just as we. There was never so much an ugly man as did not see the beauty in others. And there was never so much a boring man as did not value the differences in others. But tell me," said Jean, "Tell me how it felt to be so learned, always having an answer for everything and how I might become so in the due course of my time."

"Never shut yourself off from other people's pain, however great, Jean. For when you feel pain, you seek the cause, and when you seek that, you feel the grain of the candle, the wick, the cliff that dashes the waves against. Then you may set out in a boat to cross the horizon, and begin to heal it. That is the only advice I can give you Jean."

Jean nodded and stared out to the sky, his gaze flying, like one of those robins he was always versing about, his frame feeling like a wooden boat ready to voyage in water.

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"We have to eat, just as you have, you know," she said to her mistress. 'We make the food for you, prepare what is inedible into something which can be ingested. Don't you think, that for all that, we ought to be able to live in dignity, send our children to good schools, so that they can grow up to be as clever and well placed in society as you are?" She was definitely watering it down, using a bit of flattery as well. "Are not the favours we do for you, being included as one of your family, worthy of just recompense? You pay singers and actors and writers, those who entertain you, well, how about us then, those that, through feeding you, keep you alive?'

Her mistress said, looking alarmed, "My dear if that is the way you feel, then surely I will pay you what you ask, seeing as what you say is only the truth. I had suspected the difficulties you faced with

you communicated them to me today, and having been far busier than I would have preferred to begin to address them, I now feel an imperative, as a member of my class, to make sure that you are justly reverenced and recompensed."

"For cooking, I will pay you E200 per month and for the washing E300, in the hopes that these will go towards the food and living expenses, and sending your children to school, after they have been born, to those with good teachers such as makes brilliance out of ignorance, so that they will not have to be maids like you, once grown. And take care that this doesn't end up in the coffers of those who drink, as I am sure you are careful of," she said with a touch of caution and bitterness.

Rizwana walked out feeling as usual, somewhat slighted, though glad she had raised her voice with the other maidservants, glad she had put her reality forwards in good faith that her mistress would believe her and act. She was glad that she now had the means to raise a family and that Jean would perhaps not now again have reason to weep. She walked out feeling, not a sense of forgiveness, but one of hope that her mistress would now begin to understand the tugging and pulling of her own heart strings which was the result of a lifetime of standing and kneading bread and breaking it, of beating clothes against washing stones, to separate the dirt from the cotton that so dearly loved one another.

Light upon light, and arc upon arc, rainbow upon rainbow, and beam upon beam. Gaze meets gaze, and barrels are carried upon the shoulders as the slanting sun's rays turn and wheedle like the spokes of a wheel, like a windlass at a well, made with fresh, sweet smelling wood and clear, reflecting water, dug in the earth to tap; that smells of damp rain and the quenching of warmth, the sundance of leaves, the quivering quiet of trees, and the whistling of storks in the air.

A new lesson here on regimes and perception.

Everyone experiences things differently. Context, perspective and past experiences inform how you will percieve what is before you, your reasoning, which is dependent on common sense.

Then, also, God will direct your vision and your hearing.

These play into your intuition, or your insitnct. The key is to be aware of how you see what you see, what you think about how it originated, how you think it should change or continue, what you think will be the results of this occurrence. Another important thing is to understand how to move forewards with your perceptions. What do they lead you to want to do, to want to create? How do they encourage you to relate to others in the world?

Be aware of what your experience or vision teaches you, was to what you should do, think about when you are next outside.

Where did the Kashmir movement originate from? The Indian Indepencdence movement? The Chinese Communist movements? The French Revolution?

Poverty is a Process, not a condition.

All of these movements originated from ciurcumstances of outrage due to severe economic, political and social oppression.

People were discriminated against for their skin colour, their birth, and made to work in the fields and pay heavy taxes. Indians could not rise above the post of Risalder or Subedar in the army, or above the position of a clerk in the East India Company and its branches. People were oppressed in the land of their birth by a foreign people who shared none of their customs, philosophy and whose technologies and way of life were alien and invasive.

Canons, guns, dams, invasive, aggressive, violent technologies that killed people and altered the landscape and ecology.

Chinese Communism was a reaction to the severely exploitative system of feudalism in Pre-communist China, wherein the landlord exacted a rent from the people or serfs who tilled the land. The landlords often lived in luxury and did not work, while the people had to scrape together enough resources to pay the taxes to support the landlords and themselves as well.

The Chinese Communist Movement. It is now supposed to be a democratic and open discussion on policy and condition of unity in upholding agreed upon policies. Collective ownership of the means of production, such as fields, factories, mines, housing, dairy, livestock, cooperatives, kitchens. So that no one will be hungry, no one will be excluded from the economic system. No one will lack money to live in reasonable shelter, wear sufficient clothing and be adequately nourished. Everyone will have to work in some capacity or another using their best ability to function and contribute to society. Some will be farm hands, some factory workers, some mine operators, some production managers, some politicians, some academicians, some teachers. Privilege of position should be abolished. (This doesn't always happen). Universal employment, universal income, and care taken of children, worker,s elderly have pensions. The governement belongs to the people, as do the means of production. Nothing belongs to only one man or woman, or only to a small set of men or women (oligarchy)

The family is not the main unit of production any more. It is the commune. Food consumption takes place in community kitchens and cafeterias./ People do not have to cook when they reach home after work. Women are liberated from the role of domestic drudge or goddess, whichever way it is seen.

The social nature of production is recognised. All forms of livelihood are interlinked. One cannot function without the other. Each person serves society with their work.

Although there is still surplus value extraction under communism, the profits go into making the commune better, allowing the machinery to be repaired, and in feeding the members of the commune and paying for transportation to market the product, as well as purchasing the next round of materials to make the next round of products. Labour power is rejuvenated daily by the chains of social relations and economic exchange. Under capitalism, your mom feeds you, your dad works in the office or the factory, . You study so that you can get a job someday, as a teacher, an engineer, and architect and support yourself and your family in their old age. Thats' how it is in a pre-communist setup, but now, under communism, your parents would have a government pension, and you would eat in a community kitchen. You would still study in order to get a job on graduation, though. But if you got a manual job, there would be no stigma attached to that. The dignity of labour would very much be with you.

Under both communism and capitalism, labour of the masses feeds the masses. There is cooperation on the job. Everyone puts in their best effort, physically, mentally, spiritually. , verbally supporting one another. Production depends on working people. That is what is meant by the social nature of production. Without productivity, no one can eat. Work is necessary for life.

"I shall tell you a fairy story of my own," said Rizwana to Jean.

"Alright," he said.

"He was walking up the sooty hill in the gusty air, his face carved by the mist and reflecting the grey light of the skies, when Farhaan saw her in the glade, a deer of exquisite beauty, running for her life from fear of his human self. Ashamedly he was a prince. He had sometimes had trouble associating with others because of the authority his name carried. He did not chase her but followed her, lowering his bow and crying after her to stop. Finally she seemed to understand his motives were friendly and took human form and he saw that she was a princess, with hair of chestnut and red cheeks like the granite mountain crags upon which willows blew.

He lowered his face out of respect. He had no bow nor arrow with him, he had not even sallied forth intending to hunt; but now he spoke keenly and eagerly, wanting to learn from her grace, imploring her to heed his pleas of acquaintance. Let us be together forever and ever," he pleaded her. "So that I can learn of your grace and serve you."

"If that is to be so, then you must heed my one request," said she mysteriously. You must never ask of my origins, of where I was born, and whom my grandparents were. For, if you do, a curse will alight upon me and we will be separated forever.

"What could he say to that?" No, then, I shall never ask, he promised, and they were married happily for five years, although Farhaan had much to learn. Soon, twins were born, and stole much of their parents' attention when the parents were not hunting and gathering for a living to feed their family. They lived beneath the canopy of the trees in the forest, so the doorstep to their house was covered in moss and the roof was a dome pierced by dawn, noon and twilight at each time that the muezzin called in the southern provinces.

The little children enjoyed playing at being other animals, imitating the lion and the boar, the rabbit and the hare, the fawnling and the coyote. They even played at being bees and bears, tigers and wolves, sometimes their father would say "I'm a wolf, and must go forth to hunt," when in reality, he would be doing just that, but would not have been let go by his children unless he had said so.

The princess spent her time sowing the fields with rice seeds with her husband, as well as cleaning the skins of animals he brought home from his hunts, preparing the meat by salting it and covering it with herbs and spices, and stringing it from the roof-pole of their tent they called their home, above the firepit. Thus, the meat imbibed some of the smoke from the flames when it was burning to keep away the cold, and was seasoned with sage, sorrel and thyme, as well as with soot and with salt.

One day, however, the prince, surfeiting in happiness of his newfound existence, grew curious, and decided to ask his wife what her past had been like before she married him.

She looked and him in horror, and at once the heavens flashed and she was struck to the ground and disappeared from sight and hearing altogether. All that had been their life previously was vanished, along with their two children, and all the prince would see was barren ground of the glade in the place where the children used to sit and play.

"Oh, what, what have I done?" lamented the prince. "It's all my fault, and she *told* me never to ask." He searched for his lost family everywhere in the forest, but couldn't find them. Finally, mad with grief, he fetched three stones, one bigger to represent the princess, and two small to represent the children and set them in the places where they regularly used to sit beneath the trees in the forest glade. He sat before them everyday, without eating or drinking, talking to them and living as though they were yet with him in the lonely forest.

"That Farhaan has been pining for days, poor man," said a tailor. "Because he has lost sight of the doe that lead him to live in the forest. Indeed, we must find the princess and restore her to him."

"We must pack food to sustain ourselves, said an innkeeper. Here's some bread," he wrapped it in some cotton cloth, "here's some cheese, all the way from Gouda, wrapped in bee's wax to keep it fresh."

"I thank you, dear countrymen," said the Prince, rising up from his usual place where he sat, gazing at the stones, to turn to the people and fix his leaking eyes on them. "For coming to aid me in my hour of need. I shall pay for your expenses from my treasury, and we must indeed stock up on provisions, as a search party of an hundred, is unlikely to be able to be sustained by game in the forest, even if it is a plentiful one. And if we are to win her back, we must not depend too much on the hospitality of our surroundings if we expect them to give back the precious things it has hidden within its depths."

The common people swore with the prince that they would forth to look for the princess and the princelings together with him, and meanwhile they resolved they had to look for the wizard Jayanca who would save and instruct them all by his learning and wisdom. As they approached, they hea-

the strains of a lute, strumming the many hued notes of a waterfall soothing and stirring, at the same time going straight to the pith of the heart, and mingling with the sparkles and flashes of the falling river on the dashed rock.

"Be as sympathetic as my music, it seemed to say, feeling within oneself what the player is feeling, and as humble as the tumbling river, and as frugal as the clear water, unmixed with anything rich. Then, my dears, will you be worthy to call yourself a disciple of the great sage, or walk abroad to do good in the world with success, one after the other, or whichever one you will."

Then the prince Farhaan took the music inside of himself and felt it within the instrument of his body, and walked forth with renewed strength to search for his wife and children, resolving this time, not to live merely in the confines of his family in the forest, but to be more active in the polity of his kingdom, interacting with his subjects and helping them with their enterprises and encouraging them in their good pursuits by sponsoring and funding their public works, and beginning a business of his own whose profits he would donate to charity.

He resolved then to be meek as water, which always sought its own level, to be caring as a pitcher, quenching the thirst of all who were parched and who took a drought of it, and to be thrifty as the stream which flowed thinly through hairpin bends as easily as a pure thread of cotton, unmixed with anything ostentatious, or like water down the bamboo channels in the trellised terraces of fields in the eastern provinces, where aqueducts are made of wood. He resolved always to seek its clarity, its beauty, its depth, and to stop hunting, but this time to live with the tillers of the soil, dragging the plough through the ground to sow the seeds for all harvests.

Presently, he came unto a pit in the ground, and his instinct told him that that was the way to go to find the villain who had imprisoned the princess. He climbed down the side of the pit, after letting down his rope-ladder which he had anchored in a tree, placing his feet safely in the precariously hanging rungs and rappelling down like an acrobat on a tightrope. In the depths he saw a dungeon in which many fires burned, flickering and smouldering in the cold, earth-lorn darkness.

"Why have you come here?" Called a voice from the corner, a dragon stirring a cauldron on a fire and beating away the fumes with his wings. And beside him the prince saw another dragon chopping and tossing herbs neatly into the cauldron with a flourish. "I wish," said he, "To find my wife, whom I have heard is dwelling with your folk. My children also, I seek. But I also wish, since I am here, to learn some of your arts and sample some of your crafts applied by my own hands to some material, so that when I leave, I will find myself wiser than when I first found you in this pit in the earth."

"She is indeed here," said the dragon. "She is one of us. If you wish to take her back, you will have to see her as she is before you can win her back in her human form."

"There is much that you can learn," said the scaled princess from a corner, grinding herbs with a mortar and pestle, "From my brothers and sisters here. Our children are with me, so you have no cause to worry. Perhaps we should stay here until you have apprenticed under my folk, at the cauldron and at the anvil. Since you have a ladder, we can fetch herbs from the sunlight upstairs, instead of their having to fly in the daylight, where they will be harmed by humans if they are seen.

"Is that the case?" asked Ferdinand. "That shall be no more. Dragons are free creatures of this earth just as I myself, of which my own children are one quarter and my wife, half, and they shall be treated with respect. I repeal all laws that hamper the motions of dragons on the open earth, and forbid them to do any harm to human beings in return.

Granted, said the dragon king. I shall pass a law that no dragon is to interfere with the livelihood of a human being either in dungeon, or the surface of the open earth.

Henceforth, said Farhaan, the knight Prince, the Princess and the Dragon King together. There shall be peace between dragons and humans, and all struggles will be fought merely on the scale of the self, as warring with one's own self to produce good character, and we will no longer say, he is warring with his demon. That is not to say there are none, waging war upon the forces of the good in the dungeons below; there are some, but all who live below are not so.

"Chop the arrow root finely and cast it into the bubbling cauldron. Shred the clover and let them sail upon its silver surface like so many sailboats strewn and buffeted by the pouring wind. Once you have cut, thrown, let go and let the bubbling produce its own matter until your loved ones have consumed it."

Farhaan apprenticed himself under his wife's brother, and learned about the smithy, as well as about mixing potions from his wife herself. He grew resistant to fire, and when he emerged from the dungeon a few weeks later, he was a fire-eating acrobat. He opened an iron shop where he shod horse's hooves, made ladles and pots and pans, as well as skillets for roasting bread and herbs together for healing concoctions. And the princess opened a medicine shop, where people who could pay payed, and people who could not got medicines for free. And in his spare time, the prince added his shoulder to his brothers' in law shoulders as they pulled the plough, and taking his turn at it too, to make the work lighter for them."

"A prince who works for his living," said Jean, his eyes shining. 'So that's what you meant when you said I could be one. A princeliness all the more dashing because of the many things he does, and the world all the brighter for him because he does it."

Rizwana looked at him and beamed, her black braids gleaming in delight and sunlight. "That's exactly what I meant, my dear, and I am glad you see it at last."

Their muscles strained when they lifted the pot of water onto her head to carry it from the well to home. It was a long walk, and their calves burned. They had to walk slowly in order to balance the pot on her head and prevent its spillage, though still, it slopped onto her toes a bit.

***"We watch as though through a prism," said Avan, crouching covertly with Sheila at the stream, pointing at the clouds and the setting stars and the emerging planets. "You are a watcher of light, and I a watcher of darkness. And it is through the joining of our wrists or fists in alliance that there grows up a fountain of an unknown drink, that crosses its droplets across the sky like scattered star clusters of the milky way, forlorn and desolate.

"But they are not scattered, but crossing comet like beams!"

"Indeed. Do you see the beams arcing together at the top like tent poles, like rainbows tangling and swilling like bent crossing swords or chords of hemp tied together in a waving knot? A fishermen's net, these are the delicate alliances that stem from our nerves, the sinew of our hands that continues in the air to wrangle with one another, assuring that the work we do is done in tandem, in consultation, even if we never met but exchanged many words through our actions and thoughts and movements. Tell me what you see."

Sheila said: "It is like an Indian's tipi, or a Siberian yurt, that we are told of in the geography class, but also like the houses of our own home-country nomads like your people, but lashed instead with the strings of Aurora Borealis combined with dried wooden lattice work, and braided sweetgrass for securing the windows and doors."

Avan said: "In this way, it is that this world, riddled with these strings of invisible intentions, desires and logics, performed by work and articulated through the language of thoughts, and the mind, for it is indeed true that when forbidden to speak, the mind, the tongue will have other outlets.

"The labour of the hands, of the arms and the back upon the fields and the dragging of the hoe for harvests, the turning of the windlass to draw water for bathing, the dressmaking work that requires the fingers and hands to flutter up and down the cloth, sewing it together as a skilled seamstress, the scrubbing and scouring of dirty vessels, the carpentry of wood, the kindling of fires by striking one flint upon the other, the splashing of clothes against a stream's stones; these are all acts that bring sustenance and comfort and health for those that perform them and those that benefit from them."

"But unfortunately some people are no longer paying attention to these tent lashings of the heavens and the beams are growing weaker day by day. If only people knew what they were doing and omitting to do, and resolved to nurture and preserve this architecture of the created worlds, which

intersect and look out onto one another, which, if they do nothing to repair, the worlds will be remade afresh at the end of time, but their souls require the work for their salvation."

"It was said among Catholics of the North," said Sheila, "That wherever there is a gathering of two or more devotees who pray for a particular thing, those prayers are always heard because they were collective."

"If we pray and strive our best through our work and prayer and cooperation, we may succeed in salvaging these vital lashings of the heavens, but if we fail the mushroom cloud may descend and the world will be plunged in fires and soot from the wanton flames and escape will be difficult."

"To be sure, much of the reason for this rupture is the emergence of factories and machine-made products in different parts of the world. When a shoemaker stiches, or a basket maker weaves, or a herder herds sheep, these lashings are strengthened through the joint activity of the skilled hands and the inspired minds. But when these necessities are made by machines, although through designing them engineers certainly strengthen this net, the hands and minds of workers who man the machines are impoverished through being forced to continue the unthinking and repetitive actions they must make, and the sparks that leap from their sinews to strengthen the heavens' chords are weakened and the net is ruptured easily due to its starvation of truly eager and energetic sparks, the dimming of happiness among the workers and their families, as they toil in a drudgery of mind-numbing routine.

The profits of these enterprises go into enriching the coats of the capitalists, while robbing the coats of the workers of their due patchwork and repair, and they become thinner and more threadbare day by day.

'But what are we to do?"

"We are to strive in every way we can, we must stick to our handicraft processes, that we make our contributions to the web of thought and work, and continue in the way of learning and developing and praying so that others may be brought back to the path of Remembrance and ever turning again and again to the Thirstless One who promises to restore all to those who seek him."

"He is thirstless, al Quyyum, but he thirsts for us. This thirst is cancelled out by our thirst, which is for him."

"But people need to know what they seek, before they seek it."

"Oh, they already know. Inside, they do know, they already know. But of-course, you are saying they need an upbringing, some sort of an education, or skill training to find it out.

Turn the shovel in the ground as if you were wrenching free a rock from the garden, that way the soil will fly up, quick and light, in arcs. Lean into your work, and feel as if the whorl of the world in its chalaza, its caul, were, not your liminalities, but your very center, your flexible self, your core, your essence, your being.

The leaves and tendrils of the vine creeping over the elm tree, your nerves in your arms and your hands.

The sky, the skin of your forehead and nose, and the feather light furze and folds of your cheeks, and say, "You will ever be mine, o roof of the world, o shelter of the destitute, o ceiling of the wanderer and plyer of wares."

"But remember, you must not put out your hand to touch the arc," she said. "A child is forbidden to look upon the nakedness of his or her parent, and Uzziah, David's assistant, when he put his hand upon the arc, died. The arc was too sacred a thing, having carried the remnants of all life on earth, for man to touch, but had to be kept in the tabernacle behind a veil."

Sheila said, "I saw a misty light illuminating the tiles of the house platform,

Wet by the rains, blackened by moss and fungi in grooves,

A tree, drooping and dripping its fresh leaves shining like diamonds,

Free, unfettered, nodding in the eddying breeze.

A temple, rising in the mist in the distance,

Carved with rock deities beneath the rainbow of delight.

The Lord will look after them, in the arc floating upon water, all the spirits and fairies of the arc,

As long as they plot and plan only good, the progress of those on earth.

“The whipping wind outside

Screams to you to step in it,

To stand, under a tree,

Your hair whipping against your face.

Cold and draughty, desolate

And then craft your words on the notebook page

Whatever comes to your mind, with cunning

The words stirred by the holy spirit

Written down

Will bring clarity to the direction of your thoughts and life

It is the bread of the staff of life

The breadth, the breath of God.

Our lady speaks to us in the wind,

The word of God is precious

Her word precious too

Like amber gems in rain.

I wonder when the shifting branches

Will have swayed so long they sing,

And when the hauling of hay dispatches,

Worker to a better spring.

I wonder whither they will go

Beyond the whorling branches long

Into the sunrise, full of birds

Flapping the clouds to puffs and throngs

Near smoke covered chimneys weather beaten.

I hear the words,
“Make way for others too in your journeys

If you walk so long ahead,

They’ll be ever behind you

Or you'll have to step aside a time

For them to surge along the narrow road or tracks

Or both of you together, through sweet fields of lustre, bending branches of timber, honeyed sap and branching amber

Hills of height and valleys plunging

And canyons shining with granite's roughness

Lit with purple smoky light and red haunting rays of the sun's deep setting

Trees that stand against it, silhouetted,

Stencilled, pencilled, grafted, girded

On the night, to the crumbling passes

Of path through the mountainous rambunctious height

The moon glances, it is a lance

A lash of the wind, a bridle to rain

And sweeping flashes of water

And breeze and cloud to water its serpentine roots again.

There is nothing that exists for its own sake; Understanding this

We take comfort, away from the

Horrors of Isolation and delusion,

We make way for others within our being.

Our hardy being, weathered

By wind, water and toil

Like the tree, fed by the things that it resists

Friend of the very resistance

Of the wind that challenges it grow

Stronger, gnarly and grounded in grime,

A carbuncle of leaven,

An oyster of lime."

Avan said:

Fine familiar, but don't get snarled up on old songs

Let the new ones rush past.

Jaydev. A skipping beat.

Da da da da, da da da, da, da da, da da da da, da da da , da

Each sing on, on with their own strength and grace and rhythm.

A rising temple, a pagoda, shining with light.

A door carved of graceful maidens

Holding urns, hair adorned with flowers,

And horse men, their wild hair, their locks flying in the wind.

Come back, come back to us, we wish ever for your return by the moon years,

And the ebb and flow of the tides.

Worship is not just about what you say,

But about the electricity in your limbs,

The currents and warmth and coolness in your body,

That stir you to do things.

The sun sparkles, urging you on to work as you speak,

The moon rises, glancing on silvery and soft,

Urging you to speak as you work.

And then the desert wind, blowing and blent,

Your cloak in a mighty banner against

The blent blue sky and the sands, your staff rises in greeting and amazement,

The wind rises, and you know the most powerful God from whom all gods emanate,

Of whom the Djinns are servants, speak from the wind.

I speak, you speak, they speak the lesser gods and spirits and djinns speak,

But when He speaks, we are all silent.

Untill the moment when, each in his little corner,

Speaks to their lord form their heart,

And the quiet of the desires of their weaned soul,

And what we speak in the world of men and women must be inspired by this.

If not, it is fit to be cast into the abyss.

There was an eagle, a mighty eagle. He flew all above the rocky plains, atop mountains, piles of stones and pebbles (to do something for ragpickers)—and brown and grey and white and black rubble, making his nest among the rough rocks, porous with wind.

The same wind filtered through his feathers in gusts and bursts, gushes and brushes, making the fibres along the filaments shiver and wave, like the plumage in the headdress of a chief or an Indian brave.

One day on his flights, he passed a tree of cedar, tall, strong, supple, red and deep sorrel in the smooth lined bark, with waving branches of sparse leaves of winter, shivering fluttering, grey and green, like mint or sorrel or drying chowli, and he plucked the topmost branch of it, and carried it in his beak to a watering hole.

In the moist mud, he dropped it, that its plucked, broken stem was in the soil, and he scrambled and covered the broken part with clay.

Soon, the branch, having access to water, began to bloom. It put forth juvenile leaves on the right, and on the left, and on the sides and on the apex.

It grew into a lovely vine.

One day, a second eagle came by, surveying the lands, and saw this growing sprig, this stripling, this curling whirring vine.

Although it would have liked to, it did not dare to pluck it, for its nest, because it knew the other eagle that had planted it, and that the lovely olive coloured leaves would wither and its beauty fade, and that it would make the other eagle sad. Besides, the second eagle loved to fly by on the gusts of wind, that made it rise higher and higher and see the focal point of the cedar branch growing and growing, its leaves like a fan, a fern, and blowing feather on a parrot's preened wing, or green flags of religion flying like banners above a darga, and shrinking and shrinking, remaining as a seed, a piece of shrapnel, in his beating heart, hoping and wishing for its own sake that the dear thing would survive.

There is an innate predisposition in man and woman and everyone in between to seek for that which calls him towards itself, on and on through deserts and through rivers, through the mists of time and the rains of jungle, and through clouds over mountains and winds of seas and oceans. For each person, it differs, because each has his own unique predisposition, his own unique calling, talents and work, their own individual destiny."

And on your way, on the rope ladder to the roads that call you, remember:

We all rise and we all sing, lift your hearts and praise the lord for all he has done for you. Sing joyously and lift others who hear you. Make new things which reflect the beauty of his creation, which reflect the complexity of your relationship with him.

Sing like thrushes, nightingales, sweetly, searingly. Pour forth your love into your words. Let the sunlight stream into your eyes, and follow the beams as ladders are followed by those who climb. Sit among the bryophytes and the palms, run your hand along the edges of the ferns and jasmine leaves, which grow straight and veined, shone through by sunlight like precious malachite cut form a cave to hang in stained glass windows.

And beware of food and drink, for it is these which, if you are too full of, Satan may be nearer to you than your own dear soul is. So always watch and beware lest your desires overtake your needs, that turn them on their heads like hourglasses made to lie and run in the reverse.

Petition God to meet your needs and work with your hands, heart and head to fulfil them through honourable exchange of carefully crafted goods, like windows and doors that open and shut perfectly like shoes that buckle and lace and fit snuggly and well, or like grain that grows on the stalk or children well taught, and share it with others when you have a surplus of goods, and keep moving forwards in the hope that all strife has a reward and all hardship an end and recompense, when it is married to duty and by faith.

Just as sparrows have twigs and branches in their nests that arc across the sky, in the same way, we human beings have nerves that arc across our bodies, creating sensation and creating consciousness and life.

Leaves that shine with an unearthly light

Gleaming blue in the depths of the forest.

Softer than milk, and sharper than emeralds,

Like the soft coconut flesh of a girl's smiling cheek.

"It is easier to keep from getting ragged when you eat fruits and vegetables. Hence we must grow them either in our own farms and gardens or we must barter our shawls and tapestries for money, with which to buy them in the market. It is not well to live only on grain and pulses, as people are forced to do. In Nepal, women in sowing time go to the fields having eaten only a potato and half an

apple. This is unjust, and we must produce more for lower inputs, and sell at lower prices while we are subsidized by the government, so that others can eat what they were meant to, so they can get their shares, get their fill.

"I shall show you your mother," said Avan, sad that Sheila had never seen her own mother, and being a natural conjuror. She held her steel glass up to the sun and said, "Watch, watch, do you watch? See how the light grows on your mother's cheek, how her eyebrows, feather arched, curve and her eyes shine like coffee pools or deep like blue skies of the wind's orchestra, the plunging violin pit of the welkin? Do you see how the sun shines out behind, her, so that she walks towards you lit from behind like a messenger? Or the way the dewy peaches grow on her dark cheeks, the sparrow flocks of her eyes, or the tabernacles of her forehead gleam like the regal rocks of granite on the peak of a cliff, or like dark alabaster clay being gently shaped into an urn on a potters' wheel?

Aid her always through your work and make things lighter for her, churning the butter with energy, sweeping the floor with swiftness, and kneading the dough with power and dedication. Then she will truly bless the fact that she has a daughter, a girl who is responsible and fulfils obligations towards her family members, and will cherish you forever. (More here?) Mei said to Sheila: You, or we, were always able to eat after seeing the kittens.

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Scrubbing, beating clothes in the gushing stream. Bubbles crackling on one' wrinkled hands. Foam lathering, seeping, sizzling. A leaf floating upon the skim, or a wandering bark, a straying ship, a straggling strand. A boat, a canoe, a catermaran, flying cascading over the running brook. Washing stones, eroding pebbles with patience and persistence and the simple doggedness of a carver of marble leaning and chiselling as he feels the angel stirring out of the rock, as Michelangelo felt the wings of Gabriel leap from the marble like wax spurting.

And when she was done, she stood like an erect sail, her veil trailing down her back, head high from her chest, her limbs straight and narrow, her nose beaky, arching up to the sun like a mountain crag.

"Aid me to carry the clothes in our baskets," said Sheila, heaping half of the cotton into Avan's basket. Shredded cotton, woven, blouses and dagris and chaderis, which Avan would then strap onto her back and traipse along with her over the woods' tangling roots to the washing lines outside the houses and tents, on which the girls would strain to the tips of their toes to hang the dripping, sodden patched coloured canvas-like-material over the lines, resembling prayer flags fluttering in the wind.

The clothe's lines were those that stretched out in the distance between Sheila, Yasinia and Aref's hut, and Avan, Wajma and Philomena, and Khala Sakineh's tents.

Above them and behind them stretched the mountains of the Hindu Kush, snow-capped and high, bitten peaked, like an unripe pear that has been dug into with one's teeth, which are jagged, cracked and yellowing.

The blue sky, sometimes enamel, cobalt, robin's egg blue, shimmering sapphire, ammonite pooled, often purple garnet, arched over them, trailed by scudding clouds, occasional grey egret, white or pink or yellow, like canary feathers or molten egg yolk sunny side up.

"Your greatest strength is also your greatest weakness, and the other way around too," said Sheila. "Never be ashamed of your problems but always develop your capacities and follow your talents.

"What are the properties of bunge?" asked Yasinia to Avan. "If you remember that is."

"Oh, Turkestan Mint, you mean," said Avan. 'It's a calmer, a sedative intoxicant. Grown from a small deciduous shrub growing upto one meter in height. Leaves, stems and flowers contain lagochiline and are toasted or roasted and made into tea as an intoxicant in that country across the border, read Turkmenistan."

"I see," said Yasinia, considering kidnapping some from the hills for her garden. 'What does it look like?"

"Well, its got dry sepals reaching out like barking dogs, lapping lime green corollas hugging their necks, branching out from a supple downy stem, leaves like mung sprouts, two sets down the stalk, interspersed by flowerless points and based with prickling thorns.

"Leaves shaped like the peacock feather with sharp angles for arches, alexandrite coloured, ballooning upward from the veins. Shines in the waning dusky light. Seeds like caocao beans split in half, flowers like dragons beating their heavy wings to stay airborne."

"If one wants to keep the feelings that nature gives one, he or she must strive for the sustenance of the day, nothing more and nothing less."

Yasinia called them in to stir the lentil soup after they had mopped their thresholds of the dripping, trickling water which they channelled into the makeshift gutter through means of wooden beams.

And there was an evergreen sapling, grown up form a rough and pitted peach-pit like seed, fallen into the earth and sprouted, that arched its branches, stretching from beneath the thatched awning of Yasinia's arched window, to the trailing patch, caked with powdered, brick-hued clay, spreading its leaves like proud tresses and raised arms of a whirling, dancing maiden or sybill or prophetess, that bore fruit of the custard apple, star seeded and creamy white, covered by scaly alligator skin and blackened harsh hide. It was from that tree that they ate on the Autumn Equinox, when they would eat little else, but would keep watching the sky for the signs of the sun's burning a galvanized streak in the air like one of Saturn's rings, a needle scraping scratches in the sky's blue enamel, against which the ripe mellow yellow leaves, and orange of the trees in with globular branches, raised their arms to the heavens like milling galaxies, shivering, and shed their shields.

Intoxicating mint, oak, poplar and leaning wild hazelnut, almond and pistachio trees wound and whorled as though in a storm twisted, their leaves sprouting like stars, bursts of firecrackers on the mountains that surrounded them, their roots reaching deep into the red laterite earth, their emergence like chrysoprase, a delicate layered sea green, from ruby and white crystal in metamorphosis, given birth. The trunks of juniper nearby were covered with rough-hewn bark, but their shrubs, in medley with the other trees, shone leaves light blue, dark green, grassy green, apple, forest, Kelly, lime, sea, aventurine, a set of colours to soothe the troubled spirit, bringing inner peace and used to reduce stress, develop confidence and spark imagination, bringing prosperity, the stone for January. Their trunks in the rain straining with wetness, bursting, some of them trailed and hollowed by ants and bees, and stuffed with hornets' nests. Motes and twigs of scrambling, scattered hay perched between the branches forming the bird's homes, and the silky crisp thin layers of the honeycomb near the belly of the tree, studded with wells in bees' wax, within which the insects regurgitated honey, were the textures that found a home in the lightning struck, yet quick and living, acacia tree that stood rooted between Sheila's house and the Kurds' camp.

And Avan said; wait, to take the sheep to the grazing, we have already done today, wherefore are your hurrying? You forget yourself and me in your haste, not to mention your brothers and sisters.

One out of every five Afghan households have people with disabilities. According to a survey conducted by Ahmad Zahir Faqiri, a majority of persons with disabilities are in the age group of under 14 years. Among the population of all these children, children with disabilities face many challenges and are in a vulnerable situation due to reasons such as poverty, illiteracy, lack of health care, nutritional support, as apart from a prevailing insecure and war-torn environment. "The level of literacy is lowest among children with disabilities and especially among girls with disabilities." Afghnaistan's constitution possesses many enabling articles promoting and protecting the rights of people with disabilities, and in addition, the government of Afghanistan has formulated a number of legal frameworks and strategies to empower people with disabilities to overcome poverty and promote social integration. But yet, the children of Afghanistan lack their needs being met.

The greatest need for integration, in our society, at the moment, is to bring school-age children with disabilities or 'handicaps' into the purview of the educational system; they need to learn skills for later in life to empower them, make them functionally able to work, to enjoy their childhoods with the satisfaction of intellectual thirst and curiosity, useful and happy, to be financially independent or to contribute to the finances of their families of residence. Because of the fact that many of these

children cannot walk to the schools or in any way get there on their own, and because their families can't afford to spend money or cash on transportation, keep them uneducated in their letters, at home. These children are in particular need of being sent to school by some means or another.

The land being uneven, hilly, ridden by rocks and mountains; these children need to be sought out, roads built and vans or jeeps acquired in every village to transport them to and from home and school, with teachers trained in attending to their special needs.

The paper says, through development and humanitarian work, disability has emerged as a cross cutting issue in all policy and programme development and implementation, monitoring and evaluation procedures. The three principal areas the Afghan government has unearthed in terms of intervention to create enabling environments for people with disabilities, is access to education, access to justice, access to decent and full employment and good governance.

Look up how to teach children with disabilities.

Some people say, what is the necessity to produce more now that you have already culled the food for today and for tomorrow, in a fit of industry? Do not be like Martha, who told Jesus she thought her sister was lazy for sitting and listening to his parables while she worked in the kitchen.

After all, look at Punjab, in India, our neighbour. It produces – quintals of wheat per year, but the nation has a large percentage of its grain and other foodstuffs produced rotting either under open skies, or in go downs and storage rooms. Another fact is that each storage room needs to be designed for specific content, because the temperature and humidity have to be adjusted according to the specific requirements of each type of grain, pulse, vegetable or fruit.

We all know that without industry, and by that I mean hard work in the fields, nobody will be fed."

To everything its time and to everything its season, its wisdom, its sorcery and its awe. / Do not be like Martha, who told Jesus she thought her sister was lazy for sitting and listening to his parables while she worked in the kitchen. To everything its time and to everything its season, its wisdom, its sorcery and its awe. And whence we will return refreshed and go to pasture the next day, in a morning that is cold and washed in the rain of listening.

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Turin, who had had polio a few years before, at the age of three, was scrawny, devilish and anguished, angular, trotting and maddening. "Oh, rider of the blue horse!" he cried, tottering in peculiar jest to his newfound playmate.

"Oh, peacock, oh minstrel without a lute, come help me with the milking, and be of some use here!"

"See the way he talks," Yasinia muttered. "That's only because it's the way his sister talks to him."

Gibrail replied: "With a thousand prostrations, oh King," and Turin began to chase him round the house with aggravations. "Don't call me king," he said furious. 'When you know all kings are villains."

"Yes, we're only –"

"You're only trying to get some work done here…"

"All kings are villains? What about the Kushan kings who patronized the carvers of the Buddha, before the revelations of Islam, may God protect and defend the prophet Muhammad? What about Ambi, the king whom Alexander defeated? Were they all crackpots, or rather, despots, like Turin? Or were some of them of some sense, propriety and honour?"

'Don't scholar me," said Turin, though he couldn't hide his interest. "Indeed, I hope Ambi was lovable. But for us people, have there ever been a king among us, from us, from the times of the Harappan granaries were raided, the ducts broken, the maidens kidnapped and the people converted to a labouring class?

"But how?" well, there is some honour in working, which I suppose can be used to prevail upon people."

"Come, let us braid the dried leaves into wreaths to hang on the handles of baskets, so they can be carried to market with our harvest of wheat and corn and lentils, scattered with coriander and tej patta.

"Sit with me. Hold these ends of the reeds together. And don't squirm so much, for goodness' sake!"

"And you. Make sure you wend them with the proper pertness and tightness."

If only those people had known, that to subjugate a race would invite dire consequences.

That the people who had been kept under, refused an intellectual education, forced to do hard labour, even to lifting nightsoil from latrines with their bare hands and scoops and shovels and buckets, would one day emerge articulate from their struggles, to speak of the solidarity they built, of the alliances they forged, of the beautiful words of friendship they spoke to one another's faces, that made them into strong, proud and confident people, always willing to listen to others, empathise, invite them into their own lives. That they would one day walk like whirl winds, the fiery lines of ki or life force, emanating from others' bodies anchoring them in the diadem of winds, making him one of the many lynchpins of the universe, necessary and wanted.

This would then allow them to be making them able to sense other's movements and feelings, as a hawk senses the traction of the gusts of air and currents of breeze tugging and pulling the feathers and sinew and bones of his wings, which he can feel within his centre of gravity, wrapped, spooled, within the interstices of his bones and the pockets of his flesh.

"Mufti Ismail Menk has a dua. "May Allah clear my chest. May I speak with confidence. May he make my tongue unknotted. May he give my head the words."

Oh, didn't you know those were the words of the prophet Musa before he spoke to the Pharoah? And that he had a stammer. But when he spoke to the Pharoah after saying these words, his stammer disappeared during his entire conversation.

And that it is the same with people who have a stammer who try to recite the Quran. When they speak the words of this blessed book, their stammer disappears. It's a miracle. Or even if it remains, when they get to the part 'Au thubilahi mina shaitanir rajeem, bismillahir rehman nir Rahim," their words emerge clear as day with no stutter."

Yasinia was saying these things to mothers and children that came to the house for practice reading, writing and reciting, because her sister Sheila was away at college, and she herself was willing to help them. She encouraged them to write down poems of the visions that came to them as they walked across the hills to her house, the scenes they saw, the sounds, the images that flooded their mind as though in a response to hallucinogen when the dashing smell of the juniper flew crushed on the chilly air.

Men stoking fires at the sides of the streets, their shawls around their necks, on their haunches warming their hands near the spitting coal, that bubbles and smokes. (Improve this part)

Women, cleaning the floors outside their houses, combing their hair against the bright fabric of their shawls, thick and woolly, standing on charpoys, sweeping underneath the rafters and rooves, carrying dustpans, children running round in circles chanting scuffing their feet against walls and pebbles, falling after one another in perpetual cascades of running, screaming, challenging each-other to get up and catch up , twisting about and tagging them. Kicking up dust like rats, seeming to say, relate, oh please relate, do not be silent in the face of so much life, and so much vim and vigour.

It's not always speech that warns of love, but the work of creation, of service, of labour with the hands, that reeks of the heart's blood, that tells of fondness, that tests of dedication and commitment and human warmth in this wrapped blanket of the world that holds us, sustaining and nurturing.

"Pine trees, shivering in the wind.

They have no jackets, but cloaks of fir.
And cones are the little prickly porcupines
they send forth,
To be their emissaries to the mountainside.
The blue sky, enamel and coated
Painted like the domed ceiling of a darga,
Carved like the trellises of a hennaed hand
The tracing flight of pigeons and weavers and common starlings
Checquered with arches of lattice and
Soaring stratosphere."
"The dreamy cloud like a circling restless spirit,
A girl's dress trailing like a banner.
In them nest crows, jackdaws, blackbirds,
Birds of a feather with jostle and caw,
Jiggling and nipping and fluttering
Crowing and feeding their cheeping young
Who are always hungry for wriggling insects
Their mouths open like caves', perpetually ajar
The birds take to the air when they have
Had enough of nestling, or wrestling
When they are done with sleeping,
Their heads under their wings,
Or when they must provide for themselves or for their families."
"In flight their hearts are open,
Embracing the air, suspended in flight
A hummingbird feeding on nectar from blossoms
Storks stirring in the river with their long beaks
Feeling the waves, ripples and tides, wrinkling their long webbed feet,
Abrar: "I will not romanticise them,
They are not ungrasping, hawks seizing rats and snakes
From holes in the ground, wheeling and twisting screeling animals
In the morning mountain light,
Hanging from their beaks,
Or crows with twigs trailing from their gizzards

Ready for nestbuilding.

But they are not grasping,

Even their nests, their houses,

Can hang caught in their beaks, as they fly,

Like turtles carrying their houses on their backs.

There is nothing, food nor raiment, nor shelter,

That birds cannot fly with,

Soaring for journeys of far off lands

Nomadic, itinerant, free and unfettered."

"A village of tents, neat, torn, washed,

Their cloth stirring in the wind that stirs down the valley

Like prayer flags, or rushes down the edge of a river.

Sticks raised in wells stopped by pebbles, to form a framework

On which the fabric rests.

Trees, hard by, their aspen leaves quivering

Shaking and shivering water

In the washing of the cold.

Wind, shining in the sun like

Clear earrings and noserings of jade.

The trees with gnarly trunks riddled with stumpy branches and grottoes,

Tangling roots, stretch their arms up to the sky

Like dervishes in prayer, their leaves rustling,

Paisely shaped, fat, like circles of cucumber, points of light,

So fresh, so green, so kind to the eyes that gaze upon them.

They do not discriminate between the hearts of different castes,

But reveal themselves to the hearts of children, parents, labourers, workers and lovers,

Whosoeever seek the solace of labour, solitude and animate beings.

"Eyes tangling with branches, Speaking like pools of spooling summer

Unfurling with the whorls of dried grass in the relentless light,

Rippling with branches that stirred them. A woman, rising from a well,

Into which she has climbed, To retrieve her lost bucket

She is nimble, has climbed down the niches in stone with

The utmost care and grace, but perhaps some other impulse beckoned

Too called, the well of the soul beckoned,

And she wanted to splash, or touch, her own reflection in the water.

And then, as a woman she seized power,

Knowing as she had from birth that nothing she could see was

Anything until she took control of herself,

And organized herself with other women.

The air, the wind, the eagle's wings, the ivory cloud,

The obsidian feathers; she breathed power into them,

And breathing out power,

She became power within and knowledge and knowhow,

Extreme tantra and skill.

A pestle, pounding in a mortar, sprinkling the powder with

The intentional breeze of one's lungs, a world revealing itself to other worlds,

A gust overtaking the leaves, so they can see and have commerce and communicate.

A merchants's ships filling with wind,

Or rushing fire of a dragon consuming them."

A whispering prayer flag, a swaying pole, climbing lamas, the spires of a lamassery. A wheel upon which men and horses strain, winding to and fro, precarious mountains, a pinnacle of light, a banner of peace waving on a bright field, signifying confidence, benevolence and the justice of those who have been hitherto unheard.

Trust yourself, the ring of people in which you dance, it is saying. Believe in others. But most of all, do what you know is necessary to keep you working and experiencing and analysing all that you know, revisiting the past's relationships and building them based on what you perceive and how you process and synthesize what you think. If that means skipping the cinema, skipping the music, and taking a walk in the woods, then do that. If that means writing out what one has done and felt and thought and said and heard from one's friends and teachers throughout the day, instead of talking on the phone for one more conversation before bed, then do that. Nurture your conscience and your reason and your intuition like a boy would press a shaking kitten to his bosom after it has been attacked by a wolf.

Some people think that animals being different in various ways than humans, are not worth as much. But they are worth as much as humans and should be treated with respect. It's important to observe animals if one indeed wants to become a legitimate person, just as they are. They can teach us how to crawl with stealth, never hunting until they are hungry, and therefore moving with no heaviness, but each muscle thrilling with the stealth and the chase, how to pounce effectively, how to climb lithely and how to run; how to lick, and not just eat and drink, but twist and turn, coil and dangle, bat and exude waves of love, of warning, of humour and of cuteness.

Have you seen, how lines grow from a cat's back like stripes widening and expanding like circus rings, or like streaks of lightning arc across the sky, or like a hammock swinging widely in between rough barked trees?

Indeed, we can learn from animals, we can learn to pay attention to smells, to feelings of fuzziness, and warmth, to sounds of mewing, squeaking, barking, wheedling, whirling, treading, reaching, scratching, canoodling, stretching, crackling, cackling, swimming, creeping, pouncing, to sights of brightness and dark, dimness and light peeping from eyes, fur protruding in tufts from ears, like fires in grottoes, tongues licking like storks, ducks and swans gliding on lakes, like surveyors rolling

in autumn leaves that tumble and crackle and snap and whisper like wind in sails over a stirring ocean.

The coats of sheep and goats kept by Apollo's flute, that charmed them to follow him and put a spell on all that heard him. Flocks of golden fleece, kept by Jason, goats and sheep that wanted to caper round the girls like leaping, dancing waves; nimble mountain animals supple as antelopes. Like ripples twisting like dashing foam, like crests and peaks of walls of water rushing at the Quettan coast, sandy, shorelines, lined with boats.

Cream coloured, snow creatures, rock hued, reddish brown russet, ebony, sorrel, surging, capering, bleating, charging. Alyona had a thin mouth and a reedy voice, slender legs and flapping tail. Her ears perked up as she chewed, her teeth visible, as two mountain peaks chomping on weeds.

Farheen was standing with depressed head to uproot the grass, occasionally raising her head to chew, her lower jaw milling around beneath her upper jaw, churning the grass to an ingestible pulp. Little strands of blades stuck out from between her teeth, which molars ground to chew the yellow hay and little green leaves.

She tilted her head when Sheila and Avan passed, looking at them critically, straight on with a gentle sort of humour and deference. Her kid Irfan nudged at her side, which was full with milk, and began to suck.

"How we relate to our animals is the twine of our household," said Sheila. "They give us good will when we care for them well. And when they give us their good will, our bellies are filled and our hearts are glad."

It is imperative to treat our animals with respect because they give us their milk and their trust for caring for them as long as they live and praying often for their spirits when they have left us. People who kill animals for their meat, do not realise their full potential and value as companions and cocreators; the soul of any human is incomplete until it has been the caretaker of an animal.

The woman at the crossroads said, Shall I sing to myself? Or shall I sing to you? Or shall I sing to no one, and be sad. Or shall I sit with my knees crossed, knitting and rocking and humming to the children of this house?

Her companion said: Sing! I command you to sing, a song of sixpence, pocket full of rye. On what will you satisfy your mouth, your throat on other than a song, and some good barley cake, to make your good bones sturdy? If I was a good sister, I would say, read, read till your eyes become knotted, till some sense got seeped into your skull, but since I am a good friend, I shall say, 'sing' till the 'i's' become dotted.

Of what shall I sing? I am married, but Have I children? Tell me, from where does the hen get her joy if not from her chain of chicks? From where does she get the gleam in her eye, if not from their chirrupping squeaks? Behold the spicy sorrel tree, raising its bracts to the sky for those are the gifts to the sun that has encouraged it to grow. Are its branches the arms of dervishes, lifting its palms to the sky? Are its pine needles the cloak that keeps it warm despite the snow?

You are a youthful woman, where fore do you long for children, yet a married wife?

"He had got a brilliant mind, he knew what all the newspapers said, and what the leaders thought, what the eagles said, hobnobbing on the crags of the cliff.

When people fought, he chastened them not to divide themselves into 'us' and 'them'.

When he turned the wheel of his barrow, like an honest man, pushing his cart of tables, window frames and cutlery into the markets, and yelled his wares with a mellow sound.

And his memories are what keep me alive, the reel of a film, the cresses of a pond, the fireflies and glow worms over a lake, like the fire rips apart the forest, and then makes it fertile again, in ash, in which juniper and grasses grow.

She pours water for the other woman.

Green and plenty, watered with the mercy of rain of tears which is the lord's miracle. But the bombs of the mislead took him from me. And now I must look after the orphan children, of whom I have chosen as their mother, and must get work in the kitchens to support us.

Lighting out to the centre of the city tomorrow is our plan, let's try not to get up any later than the dawn peeps out through the fork in the sycamore tree outside, bathe our faces in the stream, put on the wet clothes after we have dipped in it, for we possess nothing else, and walk on our ways for half an hour at the least and let the clothes dry on us, steaming in the rising day as we walk, gypsies, destitutes, but we mustn't think that way.

'Let's grab our fates in our palms the way a factory worker grabs his wages in his fists.'

'Indeed, let's be a stream, trickling waterfall, drawn in the direction of the ocean, like ductile steel wires, or those of copper, are drawn into wrought iron gates, or metal filigree.'

Dal Lake was an expansive triangle, a heavenly blue that reflected the deep and bright excited yet soothing powder sapphire of the sky.

It rippled as boats moved across it, large furrows in a field, clouds floated within it, like cotton sopping up soup.

The houseboat was shaped like a sharp leaf, a narrow hull, and a shed for shelter stacked upon it, draped with gauzy embroidered curtains. Saira and Tutul washed the shalwars and kurtas on the edge, using industrial soap that sudded up the nearby water as she rinsed and draped the clothes in it.

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White sheep, red fire earth, sheep chewing on the long brambles and tough grass, reeds and shrubs, running here and there and maa-ing. The weathered shepherdess, buffeted by winds and sun, because she is tall, and sand whey are among the sand dunes, gathers them together as an instructress would the straying children.

A swaying oleander tree, its leaves green on top, and red on the bottom, like a dancer's hennaed feet. The buildings of chawls housing the workers near the railway tracks a few metres away.

Thank the lord for making you and everyone else, beautifully.

The bison people, with dark, scruffy, velvety manes, charging across the prairie, their cloven hooves thundering across the seemingly hollow ground, delivering the earth of a volley of sound and dust, pebbles flying, grass trampled, only to spring up again in their wake, because the rage of the bison is brief, its tyranny is incomplete. It is not like the tractor which trudges along repeatedly across the same path, with many others to follow. No, the bison population is depleted, by many generations of overharvesting and even mass culling, which the white people did to starve the Indians. If anyone had a right to be angry, the Indians and the Bison had, but even then, they were merciful to the earth for she is their mother.

When you talk to a marginalised person, you enter a different world.

The stars hang in gauzy spirals, dotting the evening sky, a bowl of navy blue mixed with pine green and lemon yellow, like a soaring, pinging, arching falling comet; planets of brightness and smallness. But in reality, are these planets and stars at all small? No, not a whit, they are vast, a hundred million times as large as our earth; the stars are, at least. And it's from these galaxies and stars, that the iron in our blood, the calcium in our bones, the carbon in our skin, and the selenium in our hair, spring. We are children of the stars, nurslings of the universe.

A bejewelled maiden emerges from the river. Her skin is the brown of the almond, of the squirrel's darker stripes, of diluted coffee with milk, of hot chocolate foam, dewy like a scented peach, her eyebrows are the red vermillion lines on a bride's scalp parting, or a devotee's forehead, the hills of

cherry trees blossoming in winter under falling snow pinkened by the sand of the storms and whirlwinds of the levant.

She has a bold voice, she is a go- getter, and she seizes the day's work by the hand, by the horns, and leads it and drives it, cajoles it into pulling half the burdens while she pulls the other half of the plough, sweat dripping off her bent brow. Or, perky and effervescent, she trains the sheep to follow her on days she is marked out to be their shepherd, schooling them in faithfulness and obedience.

Water, turquoise, white foam capped and flowing; inching in and around channels in fields for irrigation. In some places, it is transparent, translucent, black and cool, minnows darting here and there against its currents, full of algae and green blue seaweed. Sometimes it is salted, brackish, at other times, sweet.

Fire: ribbons of orange, breaths of crimson and sunlight; tried and tested gold coming through a canopy of gulmohar trees that filters it, alighting in the five petalled, red blossoms. Auburn hair flowing in curly, silken locks on the breeze, like a pack horse's mane flying on the wind as it gallops across the bracken littered plateau.

Earth: Brown, tree trunk coloured, dust, sand soil. Lining the river bed with stones and silt, choking the channels. Puffy in the rain, mounds of anthills and termite shelters, the fields of lusty, burnt sienna brown, from which grow crops of blue eared, white and pale-yellow corn wrapped in silken jade green sheaths, pearly millets, and wheat. Mud made into sun-dried, wood moulded, house bricks, tempered with cut grass and gathered twine, to make them hold together with consistency.

Wind, flying in the wet needles of rain, winnowing the sandy deserts, billowing the sails, howling in the doorways and snatching, catching in the thawing window-frames. Flying like arrows, raising a mermaid's tresses into flags as she suns herself on a sea rock, whipping the sea water into mountain peaks capped with snowy foam.

The man of my heart is god-fearing; and humble; hardworking and puts himself to task to help others. He is a planter of seeds in the good soil; he plants wheat, cucumbers, leeks and garlic, to satisfy the hunger of his children, grandchildren and parents. He raises sheep on the hillside in barns he has built with his own hands, he shears them with a gentle and steady hand, and I spool and spin the wool he shears, and weave it into tapestries.

I drag the hoe across the red earth as it lines in furrows, I lead the vines of the tomato plants to snake up the stakes; I guide the watermelon to form a trellis across the garden wall, and raise the pumpkin from the stony soil.

The sky is a vast canopy, a tent roof of circling, homing winds, rustling the leaves at the forest floor, but my family is cosy in our homestead, under the canvas roof spread across tent strings, with a smoke-hole for the fire's soot, rising in drifting spirals upon the cold, chafing wind.

We do not begrudge those who wander through the land, place to wander, nor exact payment from other nomads or aliens as they pass through the thoroughfares of wilderness, or skirt among the thorny bushes and brambly shrubs and guttering streams. For a nomad is like water, slipping past all stones, however sharp and leaving them more rounded and blunted in its wake, cool, overflowing ever passing by, neither greeting not saying farewell. Nomadic life is an eternal being, immortal, un-finishing, like the wind, with many pauses, many looping backs, like the filaments in a parakeet's wing feather.

A snowy clear glacier of dove colour, feeding into rivers, eroding, capping the mountain, feeding the ocean, translucent and fine, a face, carven of meadows, sweetened by milch cows, lined by thistle and pine; she speaks and she spins, with wool and with needles, till her children do wheedle, for her precious time; as she is working, a traveller comes begging, she gives him a packet of bread-loaf and butter tied up with twine.

Then when a prisoner, chased by throngs of villagers, who wish to burn him, she in her house doth him hide. And when the men are scattered, she asketh the prisoner, for what deed he was chased there, he replies; "Rather than begging, he had tried to steal; he was so hungry he didn't know what

else to do; although he had once been employed; the factory laid him off, so he ran to the country to try to make a living as a wanderer, as he could bide.

Then she said, "O man, you've been through so many countries and provinces, townships, I'll teach you how to write. A notebook of paper, a sharpened lead pencil, eraser and sharpener; she the prisoner gave, that he might write poems, craft stories and tracts for the edification of others' minds.

"Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! O what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of his spirit, washed in his blood. This is my story, this is my song, praising my saviour all the day long, (2).

A picture of cherries, blossoming in pink, on a hill of a chestnut grove, with long branches on tall woody trunks, silhouetted against the grey blue pearly clouded sky, bowing with snow that hangs upon the twigs like silver icicles that tinkle when the wind rushes them together or they fall to the ground like bells.

Yasinia began singing, as she was playing on the bazooka, Avan rocked her six month old son, and Sheila charted out her questions for Dari literature.

It is a poem I have written, said Avan, after Sheila taught me to read. It is not one of fighting and struggle, how we all got back together, that will be for a later date, but a story of journey, of quest, of spells, of searching among the scattered things of this world. More will come on how we spread the weed, the printed word among those who wrangled for a living, powerless, how she cajoled them out of their misery helped them unlock their power to heal themselves and continue on a thriving trajectory.

"Where the wandering sunlight flickers,
The rust brown sands with gold
Far off neath streaked hawk feathers,
Of the eagles as they turn
Wheeling in the silence,
Weaving wind and weaving forces,
With the foxes and the jackals,
And the thorny acacia branches,
For the world is full of brushes,
Between the creatures in its fold.

Where the craggy mountain rises
Of cypress in the glade
There stands a tent of silence
Tethered to a spade.
And beneath the milling grasses,
Mingling roots and mingling branches
Runs a river wide in spate,
Carving out a cavern,
Where the ripples hide three women,
For the world is stealthy, creeping,

And they must hide a brave
And still the rocky pebbles,
In the bubbling air above,
Rise and hit the cave wall
In a traction of beating cymbals,
Carving out a channel, meandering and falling
In steps that dash the foamy mist
Against the traveller's hearing
Till his soul is cleansed and risen,
Like the river in the midden,
In his ribcage and his cheekbones,

And gives him a floating siren,
Warning him of learning
Which he must prepare himself for with prayers.
And away with the winds he's going,
A traverser of worlds
He'll hear the more the crowing,
Of mistrals in the cedar whorls,
And the tangling of the sailropes,
Whistling songs unto his hearing,
And see the shipmates milling,

Round and round the open railing
And he comes the son of tailors,
To the seas and to the highways,
His sybills hand in hand
To guide him in the learning of lore of oceans
Deep as caves, of the chambers in his heart,
Of the rooms within a conch.
He sees the red pheasant rising, the sun
From the boundaries of the landing,
And he grips the mane of the galloping,

His billow trotting stallion,
To stay within its grasp,
Devoid of both harness and of saddling

And he rises to be recording
The law of the submerged
Those of fellow feeling and duty,
And kindness and honest labour
And he has the soundest sleep
Of any Gulliver who has swum across a channel.

A rising, mellow tune, climbing, telling. A magic that brings together many and contemplates sighing, rolling, crying tears plinketing onto the washboard of the bucket, on which one beats clothes, the three sisters weeping and weeping because the world has been kind to them in that they have gotten back together, but yet they will not let it be too kind; they know reciprocity as the stuff of their continuity, of their flow, their succession. Once they have worked, spent their power in the pushing of proverbial stones for the grinding of other's meal, even if that be women's work, that is when they have a right to rest, but they will wake the next morning to continue; it brings smiles to their faces, redness to their cheeks and lips, sparkle to their eyes.

Aref came in through the door and began to sift among the dishes of the diners they were serving outside in the eatery, while Yasinia and Sheila scrubbed and scoured the used plates and tureens, saving the leftover food in a heap beside the ice box to keep it cold for their next meal.

"More about how friends feel when they can speak to one anothers' hearts again after a long time apart," said Sheila. "Let's not be so bloody defensive. Here's to everyone who works hard each in their own ways!"

The inn thrived. "Ladle out the mass of roasting mushrooms and potatoes, out of the pot carefully, gracefully, without burning yourself, and make sure you don't break any of them, nor spill any onto the floor; the guests are waiting. We don't want a noodle mess to clean up, swabbing with all our clean napkins, for one mop won't be enough.

"Stir! Stir! Hubble bubble toil and trouble

Fire burn and cauldron bubble

Hubble, bubble toil and trouble!

Something ragged this way comes!!!!

Swilling, milling, trees and thickets,

Broccoli, sweet corn stirring thickets,

Lightning thunder come and strike it

Primordial soup all boiling stickets.

Clumping in the stir-fry pan!

Don't worry about the floor becoming muddied by all their dirty footprints and shoeprints, and pawprints for now let them talk with one another, just let them follow the paths of their ramblings down the narrow roads of their work-lives and family lives but not where they intersect, for that is sacred, the closing of the open doors.

Let them be reminiscing, talking of their steep mountain trails upon which melting ice and sleet cause the lips to turn blue, of buffalo horns which they gripped as they lead it over the frozen passes, lacquered ice crystals falling, gathering, among the awnings of the tent, in clumps of sawdust and feathers, but the skin to warm with the glow of the sun in the chill; the sparkling lattice of snowflakes, carved like windows in a prayer hall, or like the lace on the eye slit of a woman's burqua, or like henna on a bride's hands and feet, or like tangles of living hair whorled and plaited into swirling designs or pins.

"Reading is remedial for people suffering from mental illness or trauma," one teacher was telling another. "So is walking. But its so dangerous to walk in unknown places these days because of the mines, hidden beneath the earth, riddling the countryside like labyrinths, metal in bombs that should have been used for building power stations and transformers, so that people can have working fans in the growing heat, and study in lamplight or bulblight beyond sundown at home; house frames, and schools, hospitals and factories; the vestiges of the USSR and US fighting eachother on our land because they could not get along."

"I wish the factions of mujahideen, at least, who united to flush out the superpowers, from our nation, would get along now. Our bureau-crats are meeting with leaders today to figure that out."

"Ethnic separateness is the reason they have trouble getting along. Having lived separately for so many centuries, they find it hard to forge a common path."

Perception of difference and centuries long segregation of communities – its not so much the people who have trouble to get along, but more the leaders. I tell you, it's terrible."

"And you mentioned "Find a common path." That's just the clincher! They need not tramp and tread the same path all through, nudging eachother to the margins of the narrow road, and bridge, and pushing eachother into the splashing stream to rescue stolen sacks of wheat and jewellery, but need only to sow and shear and reap together, or even if their trades differ, to admit they are contemporaries, exchange news of an evening, of their differential regions and styles of expressions when they chance upon one another on the crossroads."

Avan glanced at/(shed a tear with) Sheila as the professor spoke.

"Need not weave their paths into a common string or strand, but braid, crossover, exchange their knowledges of the world so that they may know how the evening colours play on the barren shaking trees on the other side of the craggy mountain, where the vultures and ravens reign, so that they may know a different means of coping with scarcity and planning harvests and sharing common pastures and partitioning resources so that everyone succeeds in making a living, but from different niches, different layers of the ecosystem."

"The professor is right," said Avan to Sheila. "While one person digs potatoes, carrots, onions, turnips, manioc, arvi, tubers from the brushy savannah shrubs, another person gathers pine bracts

and acorns from the tall fierce mountain firs that pierce and scrape your glass ball of the sky, to stew and sprout in soup, and others, pack and nudge among the sweet figs from among the great banyans' tangled shadow, to make barley and date cakes like baklava,, and or cuts branches for shelter from the buckling oleander and bursting baobab, and saws out a table and chairs, or taps oil to sell from the splitting eucalyptus, or leaves for fodder to feed their cattle from beneath the shuddering budding cypress, grown along the paths that cut through the wheat, corn and potato fields, yellow ochre mustard flowers to be harvested with rusted and blackened scythes, skirted by paths scattered with dotting pebbles and swept dust, furrows of the terraces spreading across the landscape like milk being poured from a tumbler into a rickety tin bowl upon which a broken earthen jug, the lingam of milk, the samovar of coffee, rests."

Sheila nodded. "They need to exchange the happenings of their lives like bosom friends, fed from different breasts at birth in their babyhood, but reared on the commons of the village, under the guidance of keen aunts who want to see their nephews and nieces romp and play and be children, lightening the atmosphere for the haggard and weary adults who may, by seeing them, feel young again; who by teaching them, understand their own instructional natures; so should the children learn the tasks of life, and the relationships of sanctity among brothers and sisters, parents and children, relatives and work companions, who share a satchel of bread and cheese at midday just as they share the months of joy and toil, of differing livelihoods; yet they enliven their lives of extreme hardship and work by exchanging views, knowledges, news and greetings."

One professor asked: "Do mixed people have more of a propensity to get along with different others? You'd have to do a study."

"Indeed, Professor Thales, there's no such thing as a mixed person. Everyone's a full human being."

"They mostly stick to the more disadvantaged people of half their heritage. It's the only decent way," said Farhaan. "And everyone, whether of divided heritage or single, must fend for themselves and forge their own path which has been ordained for they and they alone."

Sheila set the table for the guests, dressed in a long hijab that was jet black with buttons down the front she had sewed on in sewing lessons with corks from discarded soda bottles in found in the rubbish heaps from the city streets of her college days; put forks, spoons and knives as well as heavy ceramic plates upon the coarse cotton table cloth.

She asked them what they would take, and wrote the orders down carefully in a dog eared, checkered bound notebook she had bought at the stationary store in the town of Sharhul.

"No wine," she said. "We serve no Sherab, except the kind they serve in heaven, which is made of the fragrance of rose essence."

But welcome you are to naan and kheema, which will rescue you from your hunger; warm your faces near our fire and brush your shalwars and pattus of sleet. Do discuss you plans; for your work and your offices, your teaching and your politics, your past and current issues, so that you can build a future together."

Yusuf looked at her with censure in his eyes, most of his friends had not believed he would ever stand to see his wife serving unknown men and women on their own business occasions. But what choice did they all have, with the rising prices and taxes, the expensiveness of the basic necessities? And Sheila was still a teacher at school, and he well knew, like the rest of them, had built her own future, word by word, number by number, brick by brick, stone by stone, stick by stick, until she could teach and toil in the same day; cajole children to learn and wait tables, correct papers and gather firewood which she carried on her head for the hearth fire, and the chips of wood and grass for the cattle fodder, toughening the skin of her fingers and palms that held also a correction pen, and the power of the pen, is such a power! The power to imagine and to create, to build and to argue, to pontificate and understand connections, occurrences, conundrums. The soles of her feet that arched as she stretched to write on the blackboard, and was running bare upon the sharp mountain stones. She had neither given up upon the toil of the body, nor of the intellect, but brought as much consciousness as she could to both.

Her daughter watched through the shutters of the glassless window, as she poured water for the guests; she too worked at the inn in her spare time.

The world opens like doors to a misty mountain scene. A slipping horn of straying cattle, blocking the light, or like a unicorn sequestering it, a cat sleeping upon the balustrade of the verandah, corn growing , a slender minaret, a striped tailed dove a delicate lattice, flowers strung, a flying feather, a firebird, a singing bangle, a tinkling anklet. A winkling bell, a raging shore, a stirring shell, a whale spouting, a barna- building, a broom sweeping, an eyelid fluttering in the sun, an earring ringing.

A skirting butterfly, fluttering, stirring up the breeze,

A skating jay, a breaking crow, a circling eagle

Flight is a joy, a thrill of hollowness and lightness,

A crop a sowing, picked at by jackdaws,

A parrot freewheeling, an egret nose diving

A girl stirring a pot bubbling, wiping the spoon on a napkin hanging from the peg on the wall.

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He was a thin, ragged boy with his ears slightly crooked and his gums bleeding. What do you expect me to do? His guardian said, harried. He had been eating tomatoes from the dustbin. "No, this is too much," the school authorities said. But the old man on the street said "To everything there is a reason." "I refuse!" she finally said, throwing her hands up to the sky. Stories come from somewhere, they said. In fact they don't grow up right from the dirt, they grow from the gutter."

"And you know it," said the little girl, seven years old, brushing her dawn-like fingers against the little boy's, six and a half, completed this July. For everything there is a reason, they said, and don't make no bones about it. He saw the girl stealing bread from the baker's when his mother was asking for bread. "he saw her stealing," she made sure he saw. She made darn sure. There was something she was trying to tell him, that's why. That when they were together, there would be plenty. Wrong or right, that's the stage she was at.

And it would never be any way else, unless they did not have to be ashamed of being poor. She is an ironmonger's daughter; her hair is bright red like the setting sun, no one tells her what to do and if they do as she carries coal she is afloat, awash, astride upon the seven airs, abloom afire, like an aged woman perpetually darning, a child, aproned, affronting.

Their guardian says, "Will you write a list, will you let in a draught, will you stand a dram, will you catch a laugh?" In all these many things they scamper hand in hand, arm in arm, laughing and crying, gathering and scattering. "Whither dost thou go and from whence dost thou come? We are not afar, we are not afar. We are approaching the star. Come, we will show you from afar, ajar. Smile and look into the pools of mine eyes. I will know you thus. Keep coming, keep running into mine arms. They are strength and you will find the courage to go.

Every moment is made, created, fashioned by the liver and the giver of life.

To hear and yet to listen, to see and let to look; she walked with him to the copse and she sat down with him to watch the iguanas. Let your eyes fall behind you, draw breath, and then let it out as a scream, a yowl, from the fire dragging your nostrils. Draw forward as you were pulling a plough behind you/ye were lugging wheat; and know that the clouds are modest, even as they flow.

The leaves are gracious, playing in the wind. Budding, swaying, tossing, nodding. The trunk shakes an arm drying wetness. The globes of the tree's lantern shaking wilfully, skilfully.

Open your eyes wide and understand. And swallow the storm and fire and thunder and whirlwind and smoke, that stretch of sea like a flowing jade snake, their skirts were cascading, emerald, maple, five-pointed spring leaves blooming to the rising light. Amethyst ripples and leather brushed sky. Catch the shimmering bores of light, let them sear through your frame like a thousand needles on a

million rays turning ten thousand eyes warming ten thousand heads, growing ten thousand seeds through the soil to the sun.

Follow, follow, the butter streams. Follow, follow, the percussive rattles. Run, run, along the golden gleams. The beams of the sun upon your floor, like a wheat for gleaning like a sapling sifting sand, like young goats for weaning, like breathing land.

Beautiful, sinuous women, with arms like snakes, their eyes like deep summer pools, their hair like freshly foamed caps on lavender, wind-brushed lagoons, their ears like delicately whorled, conch-shells, listening to the lore of the sea, thrum of the ocean in the roar of their blood, gorgeous dreams.

The apple of the eye, the eye of the storm, the jewel of the lotus, the joint of the pone, the nail of the door, the gleam of the beak's nostril, the point of the mountain, the sickle on the dome. The ventury of the omniscient in the blue sky, the whorl of cloud that is the coil of its power, its protector, its flame, the sun circle, ringed with emerald iris of the peacock feather, cobalt and silver gleaming of its proud neck, melting into the milky innocence of dawn, yet to be inscribed, inked, priced.

And when writing does appear, it is only to be washed away like motes of gum form a child's eyes, trapped in the steaming kohl ridges lovingly applied, or like pictures in the sand wiped clean by rushing waters or a baying wind.

Instruct me when I am at odds, place my feet within the stamp of your own, bend me with the touch of your flower hands, adorn me with the pink ambrosial light of your waking, the fragrance of your rosy morn.

The work-wind is my companion, he eases me, guides me and moves me, he enervates and fills, he is the most exquisite, the most silencing, the most awe inspiring. He is upon whom sound races and fragrance floats, who is vibrations, who is incense, and the bright glowing rust of the fire's heart

She rises form the moist soil, the cattle goddess, sister of Krishna and Bestower of milk the colour of snow, of slate morning skies of mogra flowers, and smelling sweet as grass, the smoke of green-wood fire and honey; the herder's restlessness was handed down the flickering of veil and hem the ruggedness of soles and staff/ roughness of skin and dryness of cracked dirt, noses arched like the sickle moon, or wide like the hearth's chimney, feet bending like acacia branches, hair waving like strands of cloud shot through with bright dun, orange and lemon, like hay on a roof, like the shadows of branches, like kelp among coral, or the threaded beams of setting stars on an early morning river.

The tribal shepherds come today, the heralds of industry and fair-works, taking all the calves, kids and cows, for pasture, without bleat they turn hooves, they look around once and are on their way towards the unknown pasture, following the quiet men and women whose forearms are bulging with veins.

They go with the blessing of a girl with flower cheeks, studded with cool bright jewels, trellised like the wings of butterflies, spray painted, gilt flecked, the colour of papaya juice, smooth as fish scales, salty as fish liver, fragrant as vanilla pods hanging in the rainy purple mist

The 'bandits' let slip no cry nor give vain thrusts, for they cannot find out their plunder but in the tincture of bells ringing, or the enveloping curtains of slender air.

She got wild with happiness, I will tell you a story to delight you. She had so much energy now, she was so happy she was someone's little sister, a beautiful and industrious girl she turned cartwheels; she wanted to learn everything all over again form her.

The girl with the long black hair, a dewdrop on one nostril and pride in her back. She had beautiful arms, come, she said, may you feel what I feel, what you see may I see also. We were lumps of clay, we were towers of leaves, we were pillars of sunlight, cathedrals of cloud/ of prismoid air after rain light, bright as sour sun-drops in the winter window silver as acrid smoke upon the pine trails gleaming boldly, dancing wildly, the wind upon your hair like a thousand rushes. He tweaked her nose and she swatted at him like an enraged cat, he said, "Alright, I'll not disturb your rest; she rose

cast off her somnolence, blessed what her grandmother had been, slender, content, sitting upon the haunches with a long back touching her earlobe as she watched the village road in the waning afternoon light, the smoke, sweet like roasting fish, the air, cold and rushing like thirsting mountain air.

Add new lessons here. Sheila told the teachers in her training programme: Always use your mileage for those who have none.

Always see all the sides of any situation. Take the opinion of everyone and move on from there.

Always use your whole body, your whole instinct and your whole intellect, and your whole intuition when dealing with the needy or those whom you care about.

Always inform yourself of the whole political, economic and social interests as much as possible.

There is so much work to do, so much, and so little time.

People think suicide is the only answer to violence, that suicide is the answer to unfulfilled love, that that it is the answer to injustice. That brutal Self-sacrifice as the answer to more oppression, recreating the power structure in oneself. No! Neither self-aggrandisement, nor self-depreciation, nor self-mortification are necessary or expedient.

But joy, the middle path, with toil and striving are the paths to be followed.

The children were running up and down the shut inn in the darkness chanting:

“Chanting, canting, cowl and ranting

Jowl and cheekbone, howl and jaunting

Shuffling, kicking, tumbling, trancing

The flamelight glances, bright, romancing

Cheeping, twittering, sparrows, sweet ones,

Tear the hemp and sprinkle it skywards,

Fall and drift the dust sprinkles, showers,

Into the flames and flies up pipe smoke.

Like the lamp black and indigo tracings on our cheek

That inscribe rapture into our souls

The tracing of indigo lace on our mother’s arm,

A henna of blue, before the paste was

Washed off, and the colour of the sky

Of the lord’s covenant with Noah.

Caressing wings of an eagle, swinging, ringing,

Rotating, crisscrossing loom of flight.”

Form your opinion based on your own personal experience in life. Read. Trust your truth and move on from there. Never scorn people because they may be uneducated. Respect ALL form s of labour, be they manual or white collar or women's care work, or housework. Work as much as you can to support yourself and the needs of your family. Make other hardworking people feel comfortable and at home with you. Demonstrate your own ability to give back to society quietly, humbly, unobtrusively, within and through faithful service and ministry to the needs of the community.

Consult your personal God with big and difficult decisions. Ask forgiveness for any past mistakes you may have made. Believe in the ability of the Lord to cure you of blame.

Try to get to know people who are very different from yourself. Always welcome overtures at friendship.

Stand on the street sometimes and watch people in different areas and observe their behaviour and write about them and revere them as your messengers.

Always respect your informants, and take seriously people who point you in useful new directions.

Engage with colleagues involved in similar work. Compare notes. Never be ashamed of simplicity of style, of expression, as long as your speech tries to convey the complexity of the scenarios you are trying to negotiate.

Say your rosary, tell the beads, with prayer intentions every night.

Treat your teachers as those who point you out to wisdom, abundance and happiness.

Wajma could see in Amina, a girl starving, starving for company and guidance, for partnership with another good and hardworking girl.

"Can we pray together? Asked Amina, almost as if she were sure Wajma would refuse.

Wajma's heart nearly broke. "Of course. What prayers will we say? What do you want to ask for?"

"We will pray for more good teachers, and that the harvest is bountiful, and for our mujahideen to be safe, and for God's will to be done in us."

"Is it," she asked her brother Aref later, "More that our oppressors don't know themselves, or that they know themselves and that others are not willing to know them, or even to know themselves? Which allows for the desire to exploit these they cannot identify with?"

"Both," said Aref, "But also, what is known about oneself, one must discover.

Amina and Wajma pull the plough together creating a furrow, digging, digging. Sweat grew and gathered on her brow and fell to their shoulders and the ragged stones, like rain from a shaking lote tree onto the surface of the river.

What was beyond the surface onto what their sweat fell? An underground river? A cindery, fiery burning furnace? Wajma had never had such rocky soil to till where she and Philomena had lived. …

"See, how strong you can become?" they chuckled to eachother. "If you just do your work right without complaining? We wish the landlord class and the beaurocrats would realise this, the ones who keep checkpoints everywhere and keep charging toll fees at everyone, without giving fee receipts, and without doing any real work. The Taliban is much less corrupt that way; at least they don't charge fees twice.

And that strength, you can then use both for your own sustenance, as well as your own defense. And the testimony of your soul journey, which is enabled through prayer, reflection, work and thinking and writing and talking with others, will enable you to plead your own and others' cases, should the time arise when you and they are persecuted.

Yet others, who are scared and not schooled, say, gracefully, verily they say:

"It is fleeing who will save us. Hastiness calls the brotherhood.

Bookkeeping and honest entry will ensure there is enough for everyone.

We will leave the land of our birth for the land of our work, salvation and acceptance,

Fair government from within, and God's effervescence he has given us

For to erect our settlement, our livelihoods there.

Leaves of sea green, a rising tree, a cross of malachite, a tent of bark

Hung with eagles gliding, roosting, each one their own master

Swinging on the breast of the sky

Like beads on a mystic's necklace.

On the ground, scurry along squirrels, rabbits and mice

Busy burrowing with the moles around the roots and gnawing holes in the trunk

A woodchuck or a woodpecker, eating stuffing out of a village cupboard,

Sniffing around a prayer niche, set with the fluttering wings of doves dusting olive branches.

A whorl of branches forming a bridge, and the river sand lady crosses,

Perches on the edge, counting the lice she picks out of her daughters' hair,

Floating them with a comb above the bowl,

The lieges of insects like lacewings drones of a hive.

A drum, sounded in a cave of the valley,

Echoing like the heart beating of a fleeing boar

Signals the homecoming of warriors

Some alive and others dead, treading upon the road like prisoners,

Their terrified footfalls in unison,

For every earthly war is an acquiescence, not a triumph,

The men are lost, the women lose, and the children let loose without caregivers.

Then, I saw a man walking across the valley

His fierce, tender face was cloaked, his lithe body swathed in cotton.

A beard like a mop, a goatee, a tortured anchor in the graceful waves of his face

The hollowness of his bare and ruddy cheeks.

His ribs slender like the oars of a boat,

On which he stands on the planks against the swelling sails.

He asks one of the sailors for a fish,

Cooks it on the prow fire,

And then gives each of them to eat, chewing it as well infront of them.

They then they notice, that his hands are punctured, and one sailor asks if he can put his hand in the gap in his side.

Only this man, I tell you, has survived death; and those who follow his instructions to the letter, also, will be saved.

Or, those who follow the prophets, if they fought and worked for the upliftment

Of their souls and those of the oppressed, will roam in gardens,

Where parrots squawk eerie loving sounds, as they wander over lakes,

Perched on their shoulders,

And lanterns of green emerald leaved trees rise above them,

Exuding cool fresh fragrance in the morning,

Like the lamp black kajal worn below the lashes,

In the night, closing their sweet ferny fronds like a maiden's eyelids,

Affectionate in her sleep.

Her dusky brows adorned by the icicles and she is sincere
Her hands by the ruddiness of her work worn, lovelorn, hardworking heart.
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There was a storm within the overturned bowl, the samovar of her skull, a tempest rapidly rushing and spewing and blowing a towering lightning gust, an empty gushing, a groaning, a whistling, a wailing, a moaning, a rattle, a whining, a pining, a shovelling, a winnowing, a throwing.

And she bent into a ball and heard it out, and she listened and became, and the bones of her limbs elongated and joined and became bolts of flashing silver thunder, weaving together with this energy the tender sky of her flesh, sinews. The gelid ocean of her blood, the bylanes of her veins, the coursing rivers of her branching vessels like tunnels and catacombs in a cave of mesmerizing murmuring channels, of the gossamer threaded passages down which darted carving patient trickles or the labyrinth of an ant's hill, or the rising castle shells of a wasps' nest, or a bee's sweet hive, its thrumming that drips in amber, nectar and honey, clogged with fermenting jelly for the baby bees, shining opal and delicate, the fragrance of saffron without a bite.

This, too is knowledge.

A dusty sheen of motes of diamonds and drying maple leaves, eucalyptus bark peeling in the nipping, dewy wind.

Well, when there's nothing to eat, you might as well think of ice cream, mayn't you? Well, when there's mango, you might as well think of sweet curds, mightn't you not? When there's a high wind, you might as well think of a gauze veil being blown away, mightn't you?

Try not to think of what you don't have, unless you can conjure satisfaction in the mere imaginings. Unless you can become a content angel with the mere visions.

But when you dream of something you want, you must then act in such a way as to attract it towards yourself.

This winter, we'll make frost weather ice cream. Shall milk the goats and cows and bonny bony bovines, bless them, and shall mix in a gravelly mixture of rose petals and ice fresh snow, and the issue of human kindness.

And what'll you do for the cattle, the leaping livestock, my dear?

Shall mix up grass, wheat sheaves, corn, brown sugar, figs, banyan tree and peepul leaves fallen to the ground in the wind, into laddus, sprightly, crunchy, balls for them to chew upon.

And what will you tell them, prithee?

"I shall tell them, come back, come back, to the fine sheds we have made you all, of ancient mammoth bones we found in the archaeologist's midden, eucalyptus branches, grass bulrushes, reed mat rooves, like toothy cairns on the mountainsides, bristling next to our cedar, mud and dung houses, the lodges of pontification, steamy fires and music of drums, violins, tambourines in reverberating nights of rhythm and the beating, throbbing drums in the hearts of men and maids and those whom the wind paints its own shifting colours.

And that is when we will truly come home, across the nipping river with its knifelike stones, its tearing winds, its leaning spades thrust into the frozen ground by strong, ebullient, and belligerent farming women who have fled to their houses from the pinging, lashing hailstorm of silver, terrorizing the skies.

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People who deal with environments that are inherently unstable. The hill like the backbone ridge of a monitor lizard. Crawling and slithering, a dragon's webbed wings flapping, the hill like a canyon, a promontory, a shooting cliff, its neck bound and softened by nets of ivy and whorls of bouncing vines, a coating of soft dirt, clumped by clusters of moss and curling, tangled briars of marram, snarled with locks of gorse making garlands for kine, for cattle, of sweet smelling heather and springy grass and clover. Starry violets and pentacled, pointed curliqued arabesques, sharp and bitter, beaded with dew and backed like throats of hummingbirds, wings whirring, burring and happily singing, ringing, tingling.

The valley picked out with sunshine and clouds, shadow of the arc, rainshadow burst, covered in slime and lathered, sun cracking baked dirt, swimming in gushing pools, where catarachts bubble and groan.

The suncrest rising, the cock crowing, beset by the springs of talons and bow legs creaking. The chimney girl weeping, creeping, sweeping, crying that sometimes life is a process of getting hurt and healing, a catharsis of giving, that when we decide to turn the wheel with the heft of our chests and shoulders, that is best for us. Of women fastly jigging and girls giddily spinning, of young boys tartly singing and tambourines ringing, fringed, jarred with bells and scarves.

The song Filled with honey or nectar divine, like the pouring neck of an urn whose spout is like a swan's graceful, leaning, peering.

And the children's braids were like mildewed ears of black, blue and yellow corn plaited with sheaves, stalks and spades, chords of wheat, tied up, woven with an emerald strand, a shining blade of grass that bent and tipped and folded over like the kneaded leavened bread, slapped, pressed, fresh and bubbling, bread rising, up and down, rolling surging swaying, moulting, folding like a scone.

The tanned alluvial of the Amu Darya were inundated by rushing waves over land, wet and compacted by the rushing waves of turbulent water, whose foam dashes its grains into swirling tractions of eddying castles; towers and minarets like beehives, battlements like the chewed ragged wisps of lice, the temple skies shot through with a streak of puffing, exploding scallops, popcorn stuffing, pearly clouds.

A molten glass, liquid lake, grey, orange, tangerine marmalade in water, swilling and turning. Spires of the telegraph poles stork like against the horizon, , evergreens praying and folding and switching like climbing teepees in the vast endlessness of landscape.

“Today we’re going to learn how to produce works of art in a collective way. I will give you a theme, or a set of themes, and you will have to run with them, writing the sensory images that come to your mind when you read them.”

“And how, then, shall we ever associate them with reality?”

“It is the tramping of feet that belongs to an artist that integrates the life without, the vision of what is, to the vision of what can be.”

“Yet, it is in the web cast between those, that the richest possibility lies.”

“Just ask the children to imagine, above and beyond what is.”

“At the doorway,

Running through the forest

Pausing on the sunny mountain peak

In the goat-shed, feeding them

Tribal woman, staring out from Taj

Standing bony carrying goats

Washing hands, carrying grass and water

Dispensing lightning and rain, weather girl."

We will then arrange them together in the right order that seems fitting; to see how multiple perspectives can produce various panels, a layered vision of the way reality is, through different perceptions.

I need you to write two copies, one on a loose page which you will hand over to me, and the other that you will keep in your notebook for yourselves and your own records."

The girls took ten minutes to gather their thoughts and put them to paper.

"Can you all now tell me what you thought and read your responses?"

One girl raised her hand. "I was intrigued by the list of images you gave, because it was of very different and seemingly unrelated pictures and scenes, but we all know in our area how all images are related, they are drawn from the very fabric, the ladders of our pastoral lives of backbreaking manual labour and ankle-bending mountains. It made me think of a personal hobby," she said. ."I like superimposing incongruent images through ball point pen on newspaper photographs, (my uncle collects discarded ones from the city for a paper processing unit) so that the lines form a trellis, a grid, a lattice, like a window-frame to look out onto another world, to see more than the mere obvious in nature."

Response 1.

:Tribal Woman, staring out from Taj. I was inspired by this image, because you can be free, even if you are one of the marginalised toiling in a dominant person's house, but yet you need to strive from hour to hour to bring justice to the air around yourself, to spin an aura of invincibility, irreproachability, and fearlessness; a crown of angels swooping round your limbs, so that you will be safe from all reproach, defamation, destruction."

"What can you do, if you alone are the minority, and you are despised? Strive to understand, and to be different from those who despise you, and be proud of that difference. Soon you will come by someone like yourself and you can band together and fight the oppression with numbers."

But before that, you must commence fighting the oppression by yourself, as one individual with an enlightened mind. You are enlightened because you know that others can be wrong, and that you are not to believe you are worthless as they say and want to make you believe.

"Looking out of the window: trees of a clearing in autumn, dark, rough, bark like shivering fingers crawling up their necks, seemingly amber winged, with space around them lit by a glowing light. The leaves fall, falling, mellow, yellow, lampshades colour lit from behind, a canopy of a thousand splendid suns. Behind, a fence made of tangling vines draped over woody stubs of shrubs.

In the bathing light of the sinking canopy, insects flit and fly, hither, thither, praying mantis, moths and butterflies fluttering up and down the breeze.

The girl stood in the midst, whirling around, her eyes cast heavenward, her arms spread wide, a smile on her face.

"Those who are rich towards God, may be richly blessed. Their satisfaction and gladness increases their intensity of perception, and with it, their blessing. The lord is pleased when he sees that his children are grateful to him, and willing to take instruction."

Response 2.

"At the doorway and pausing on a sunny mountain peak."

One's eyes are drawn fore-ward from sadness, by the cherries ripening on the tree, waving like little fingers coated with crimson paint, about to drag against canvas or piece of stiff paper.

"An autumn leaf, pink as a winter Chinese apple, red as a coral branch, orange as a marmalade sky, yellow as a banana chip, as saffola or mustard oil seeping out of the crushed seeds at a mill, or the grains of waving til.

A double chinned, veiled woman, reading the holy book just within the doorway of a church, sobbing and clutching the altar, as no one watches. She holds her chain with a cross in the valley of the wheat swaddled bosom of the hills, the fingers of her other hand hooked below her chin, but not like a coy girl ,rather like a thoughtful mother, her weeping eyelids framed with lashes like tassels of freshly applied henna on a palm or wrist from the paisley design gazing out into the distance. Her lips move in silent whispered prayers as she mutteringly tells the beads of the ebony black and ivory white, solemn beaded rosary. The slender body of the saviour, graces the cross on her cheek.

.You see this in the mirror in the distance, as you consider becoming a nun. You run your hands through your own head of hair like sluices through a gated river, or the tines of pitchfork through hay or the teeth of a fork through spaghetti, laughing, chuckling and chickling as she gazes into the autumn forest outside the window, the laughing like sparks or fizzles of light on a diamond sheened sea in the afternoon, The waves of a spraying waterfall chattering and cascading down form the height of the garrisons of a dam, the walls of a moat, clear drawn and trellised by ivy on which shower drops like kisses as mellow as honey."

Response 3.

Washing hands, carrying grass and water.

The stream doesn't just slip by, it speaks to you. The grass is scrubbed and fresh, the goats you will feed will be ecstatic. In the lake you see reflected the moon's sickle chin, an old woman's face, resplendent on the dark lake, laughing and cackling as she rows her dinghy across the rippling waters. She chants:

I will drive my boat as an arrow,

Singing, striving from the helm down the stream,

Slicing through the water, like a spear,

Lashed and caressed by its own slipstream.

As you journey through life my child,

Smile rather than cry,

Even when people frown at you.

And when in charity you are tossed

Mouldy crusts of bread,

Tell your industrious mother you'll fry them

In oil and dress the green chana paste

She has ground, to make a pattise

Of a golden brown, you will share with your brothers and sisters,

And her, with a lemon's tangy citrus juice."

Response 4:

In the goat-shed, feeding them:

"He spreads his nail pierced hands like wings, or doors, or oars, or paws, swimming and thrusting his body through the waters like through the knave of communion takers, the fish bait on the hook, and the net on the ocean to trap the swimmers and harvest them, to show how it is done to those who will become fishers of men, dart throwers at sinners, carving smiles on sullen cheeks, with sun tan lines, laugh lines on stubble, through joking with those who want to return to their true nature, but need guidance and correction.

Thus, we will fight, smiles for frowns, and rosy cheeks and hardened leather foreheads for wind's strong blight. We are the jewellers of grasshopper wings, of dragonfly trails, of filigreed earrings, of maps of stars and astrologer's charts of constellation in the evening.

We are the ivy on the red brick gate of our Father's goat-shed; the gardeners tend us lovingly to see what flowers will blossom because we climbed the walls, what fruit ripen because we fed the bees from our storehouses of nectar.

A snowfall of leaves, a rustling of many papers, a sheaf of flattened cloud mushroom. And may the gardeners, as well as the Lord, and our teachers, and the world, be thanked for inspiring us to write this. They are indeed our friends, encouragers, and well-wishers. And we will work for their purpose to unfold from day to day, evening unto evening, midnight unto night and ever repeating in cycles of word, thought and action."

Do next 2 images soon.

Standing bony, carrying goats,

For later:

Strong, wiry, bald men, in eastern, flourishing shirts, with ruffles on the hem, holding hands as they carry goats in the other against their chests, a ravine, a precipice, over which a woman peers, gazing at their reflections in a lake below. She looks at her friend, kneeling in the puddle, tracing the arch of the bridge of her foot with the back of her hand.

Dispensing lightning and rain, weather girl.

A lowering sky, cerulean and thirsty, drowning in its own water colour, misting up the view, crinkling the paper and causing it to expand, to push out, to form brailed lumps, braes or hillocks of wood pulp fibre, rice paper, papyrus, parchment. An arc of clear sky, filled with no cloud by diluted paint, sinking in places under lakes of water.

A maroon horizon, a monk's discarded robe, a ribbon of satin, flowing out behind them. A dance foursome cut out in front of the gnarly tree, two women in pastoral pinafores, with drawstrings, holding the vest material over their white shirts, their wrists and knuckles rough with washing their own clothes with blue sulphate soap and scouring powder, standing and kneeling in the shadows of leaning mountains.

The first Central Asian with a face like Pocahontas, high, flintlock cheeked, full lipped, with and round, clever forehead and almond eyes, her chocolate hair shining, twisted into a glowing knob at the back of her head, her face glowing caramel, rose, pink, from the fire at which she was stirring a stew, full of carrots, turnips and beans and wild a domesticated rice, bulrush yellow, thick, bubbling, and the hollows beneath her cheeks bespeaking a saucy smile of satisfaction and a mouth pouting in the tirade of an amused mother.

"Come upstairs soon!" she calls. "Playing with your rabbits is good, but you must all eat the stew of dumplings I have made, after a long day of having hauled grass and cut bamboo and sugarcane, picked tea and carried water up the mountainside balanced on our precarious poles, and narrow road of the hillwoman and the cave dweller and the children who fire bellows and smelt iron in the grand houses and the monastic retreats of the plateau."

"I saw a beaver gnawing at the riverbend in the valley today!" her daughter said. "It was so determined to make a barrier for its nest, its pool of a home. It worked for nearly an hour, troubling at a tree before it fell splash into the running water and stopped the flow in the bend. The beaver got out of the tree's way just in time!"

"Somewhat like you, often flaunting your work before it gets the better of you," said her mother. "Come, come inside.

The second, a girl well fashioned out of wood, and hair of chestnut, or the long strips of bark and wands of a birch tree, a netted apron hanging from her bodice, leaning and stretching her lovely limbs like a fairy tern or heron upon rocks, preparing for flight.

She is a humble girl, and virtuous, but looking for gain from her work, measuring naturally the tasks of the day in terms of the bread it would earn. Her sister says "You need to work for its own sake, and then the blessing will come upon you and you will be able to derive flights of ecstasy from the walk down the southern hewn steps, even though it may be slippery, need to derive the tickles from seeing how the snowflakes clump on your baby brother's eyelids, and how they float and cascade, glassy, slowly melting softly on the glissades of the cold, almost frozen river, forded by herds of buffaloes, printed by the cloven feet of oxen, which the nomadic herdsmen and women will someday hunt for their own nourishment, and need to cultivate conversation from a distance with the bison, call them to your shed for safety, cast a spell or make a prayer of protection around them, so that they do not run afoul of the raiding riders who wish to lay them bare and ravaged, to consume them.

"My dear, you are too street-smart, too *matlabi*. You need to let your imagination run free, unfettered, in order to draw strength from your work, and for you to learn."

"But Mama, I hear the Siberians believe that if they leave the bones intact, the spirits of the animals will return to them, or will fly free unharmed! And that the Mongolians make wooden dolls and smear them with blood and fat as offerings to the animals they have eaten, and sometimes keep a pet hawk which they call an Oigon[i], who helps them in their hunting, to make up for the animals they have killed for food. Should we really assume that others don't have rationale and consideration as we do. There's so much we don't know, that we need to find out, keep discovering and inquiring of throughout our days."

"What you seek is seeking you.[i]

The morning wind,

Spreads its fresh smell.

We must get up

And take that in,

That wind that lets us live.

Breathe before it's gone."[i]

Here it comes!

Module 5. Bullying and How to Confront It

What would you do for someone who was sad and heckled because someone else was bullying them? You could include them in your group so that they have people to talk to, and to share their feelings with, and grow together. Tell someone as many people in authority and out of authority as possible that they had been maltreated. You could talk directly to the person and confront them, explaining to them why bullying is wrong, and threatening to get them in serious trouble if they do not stop. You could write and make a speech in class decrying bullying and why it is wrong.

"Oy! What you are doing is wrong, and you know it! You'd better stop, or I'll tell everyone what you are doing."

It is also important to articulate the reasons why bullying is wrong: the person whom you have bullied is weaker, younger, more at a social/ablist/political/economic disadvantage than the people doing the bullying, and this may further weaken them and weaken the ties of society. They may go into depression or other mental illnesses and not be able to carry out their own school work or housework. They may feel like committing suicide, in which case, the people doing the bullying would be prosecutable under abetment of suicide. Bullying ruins the lives of both bullier and bullied.

When a stronger person targets someone who is weaker than them, this marks the bullier out as a coward, that he/she could not pick on a person their own size, but had to bother someone smaller and weaker than them. Others will view the bully in a negative light, and will never trust them with secrets or with serious relationships, or with serious working matters and responsibilities.

Unfortunately, bullying happens in society all the time.

Allah (God) loves the weak, (Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven,), blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God. Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be filled (God will take them to know happiness and fullness of life).

What does it take to be a peacemaker? Seeing all sides of the situation, but siding with the downcast, the marginalised, the exploited or bullied. You guide the wrongdoer to coming to feel compassion for the person he has bullied, highlighting how much he is harming the victim, and how surely God loves everyone equally, and how He would not wish his beloved children to be guilty of making life miserable for another one whom he loves.

He would then have to punish a beloved child gravely because they had disobeyed the commandment: "do unto others, what you would have them do unto you."

All our sins are written down, even if they are forgiven after one repents. Even if someone we have sinned against forgives us, we will still be called to account for it. But, not forgiving others for the harm they do to us, burns the bridge over which we are to pass ourselves. So, forgive people their sins against you, but be watchful of the socio-economic-political structures that aid and abet repeated sins.

"technology should empower people, not disempower them."

Mechanisation in industry leads to higher CO_2 output and loss of jobs, as well as deskilling. People no longer enjoy their jobs as much, or grow from their jobs as much, when they are forced to man machines, just pressing buttons, or meticulously assembling computer parts requiring tiny, nimbleness-based motor-skills.

Consequences: Headaches, repetitive stress injury, numbness of mind, loss of cognitive ability, or even loss of motor skills.

Software or hardware companies often choose to set up their factories of product assembly in developing countries a.) to reduce wages paid and b.) to hire young people, mostly women raised in traditional ways, because they have 'nimble fingers', with which they can perform delicate and intricate operations with the machinery they are assembling or arranging. They actually possess agility of limb, or nimbleness because they did housework for their families from childhood. Hence, companies should compensate them for already being trained and not exploit this fact, by underpaying them, 'calling them "unskilled" or low skill level workers.

The same applies to many men who operate machine parts in factories: their strength was built up through agricultural labour, dragging the plough through the soil, harvesting armfuls of

rice, winnowing wheat in a sieve which they cast up and down many times, or leading bullocks on yoke through the field to create furrows in rows while they are harnessed to a plough, sowing seeds in the earth.

However small and insignificant someone else may seem, never underestimate the works of God in making their life, they may know him better than you, for all the hardship and uncertainty they had to face, they may have had to rely and trust in God to a level which others should learn from.

If you ask them about their experiences, or to show you how they work, you might learn something you would never have imagined, but which might be very useful to know, if you applied the same technique to your own life.

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There is a saying: let the wind take its course. War not with the May. Non farre Guerra al Maggio. "Don't fight with the spring"

Which means, let young people go where they please, once they have attained some wisdom, some sense in their minds, so they can stand on their own feet.

There is data that reflects that young people need to be allowed to go where it seems amenable and desireable to them to associate with whom it seems exciting, for they and the household to be happy, for them to be able to find themselves and to understand their destiny.

They say, "If Allah allowed something, and you don't allow it, how on earth could you ever be happy?"

But be careful, for all that glitters is not gold. And sometimes even gold can cause rashes, when worn in ears that want to ring free.

When a bird is flying at a high altitude outside the window, it casts a shadow with its moving wings, against the slipping, sliding air, but it makes little sound except for the rushing of the slipstream, air through and around its feathers.

It is the same with children learning to fly in life. The higher they fly, the less shadow they cast against the sun, and the less noise they make to those on the ground, though of course those who are already flying can hear them, their parents who are airborne, can hear the beating flap and fluttering of their wings most clearly

It would be a strange sensation if they saw their children fly without their making any sound.

It was Dedalus who flew too close to the sun and fell because his wax wings melted.

The strings and padding of an orange, between the segments and the peel, like the highways of a city, the by-lanes of a town, bridges, coasting and soaring over a river, soft are the strings, whitish yellow in the shell of the tangy orange peel, they break within one's mouth like cotton candy, like a sugar spool.

Connections between friends are not like this. Connections between friends are strong, like the undergirding roots of broom grass that stall soil erosion.

Tangerines. They teach me temperance.

A sugar ball, a date palm, a hide and seek, a mishti doi or sweet curd, an orange.

A scroll, a ball, a simulacrum of nests, a slipper marsh, reeds and bulrushes and grasses growing out of the bog like spiders' webs, scrawls of letters, the arching grids of water-falls.

Children should be brought up to play freely with all, and in an unfettered, uninhibited manner. They should be allowed to run and shout and squeal with delight, to play in the dirt and the grass under the hot sun and in the wild wind.

The children's treasure house of birds' nests and eggs, with talismans like necklaces, and red seeds and bright parrot and flecked eagle feathers, are also created by the Lord, and are part of his schoolroom or his playroom. The colours with which he paints the sky at dawn and at dusk, dusting the trees and hills and the plains, the guttering rivers flowing over glassy stones, these are all painted for those who have childlike hearts, both real children and those who have kept the curiosity and discernment of children.

Children should be brought up to follow their curiosity and to carefully observe the world, understanding the mystery and majesty of every part of the world that presents itself to them. They should be encouraged to follow up and develop the currents that flow within their own souls, as if they were threads of the rosary, or rays of sunlight pointing the way, or currents of streams guiding fish to swim in the direction of the place where they were born.

Not only this, but hierarchies must not exist among children who play, as well. Whatever be their backgrounds, their religion, all children should have something to offer to the group and should be encouraged to be bold enough to share it. Then everyone can learn, and interact without too much bashfulness or evasiveness.

Every contribution of a child should be acknowledged by the playgroup leader, and the others should be encouraged to write a poem based on what the shyest child has shared. Then they each share their poetry and the shyest child hears it, what he has inspired them to create.

Then, he becomes open and free and bold, capable of shouldering others' burdens. Now, he can interact with the others fruitfully and in a directional manner. He should be encouraged to write on his innermost thoughts and inspirations, connecting his dreams to the things that others say, representing it in a dialectical or interconnected form.

Love your neighbour as yourself and love the lord with all your soul, all your strength, and all your might, all your mind and heart.

Be creative. Be disciplined. Helpful. Curious and explorative. Hardworking, kind to children, parents, elderly, the poor and to animals and plants as well.

If you see an uprooted plant, take it for yourself. Take a small plastic bag, fill it with soil and pack the plants' roots into it. Keep it upright at your window for the sun to shine on its leaves, and water it every day so that it grows. Later, you can transfer it to a pot and keep it on the floor of your house, still near a window, for it needs sunlight.

Simplicity is also one of the best values in life. Being simple in one's modest, inexpensive clothing, simple food and simple dwelling allow one time and attention to concentrate on the riches that are everlasting; your knowledge and curiosity (education), friends and duty towards the world, and what enables you to fulfil that duty, family relationships and your health, all part of God's plan for each individual person's life.

BY discovering your talents, what you are good at, you can discover God's plan for your life, what he wants you to do, that you will enjoy, will contribute to society and will create a consciousness of the world in you that will allow you to experience heaven and live in heaven in the Afterlife.

A group of tents, blowing in the wind. Adorned with small mirrors, flashing in the sun. Their poles meeting at the top, like matchsticks or grass or bulrushes huddled together like chiefs conferring or like hay thatching in a settled cottage.

Sara stirs a pot of potatoes and turnips on a spit outside the tent.

Samaira is mending her patchwork quilt out on the doorway's threshold, which she has marked with white rice powder on the woven grass reed mat, which stops next to the shifting sands, the striving strands of waves of dirt which rise in the morning like curls and wisps of smoke.

Leaves flying and crackling on the tiled ground where the well-off people lived. Raising her eyes to the sun, where the towels and shirts flew and swarmed and swirled, hanging on the grills in the circling wind that was like a mistral above a turret on a garrisoned castle.

In the opposition to her eyes was a jackfruit tree, that bore many luscious green and thick skinned, pitted jack-fruits.

Its leaves were like clusters of *diyas*, painted green, offering their crucibles of dusty light to the heavens as they stirred to the *arati* of the wind. Sometimes the branches bent and toppled, pliant, like fingers on a piano, beating out a tune from the chords and keys. Its leaves were succulent, and never shed.

Mynahs came and fluffed themselves upon the dusty ground and Samaira fed them. They pecked at seeds in the dirt and nodded at one another like curtseying dancers, their necks jade and emerald, their yellow, squeaky beaks and legs making sharp gold spindles from their brown feathered wings and bodies.

The rich people ask: do you feed the birds out of compassion for them, or to see them dance?

And I answer, both. Now hie thee to salah, and you will come to fruitfulness of your work, and hurry to fruitfulness of your hard toil and you must hie to salah as well. And part of your Salah is charity to innocent and talkative creatures.

A peach coloured bolt of industrial cloth, embroidered with a black man casting a net rainbow like upon the sea, to catch fish, while infront, superimposed, is a multihued and multilayerd marigold flower, and a many toothed grey, greenish blue leaf, blowing in the wind against a backdrop of abalones, mussels and scallops, and the changing purple and orange of the setting sun on the wide, expansive horizon.

Behind them rise the many layered pines, and dry barked poplars, and the curve of a mountain, a whale like crest, whose chips of rock whittled like wood by the trickling and cascading streams and waterfalls alternating between dry and rainy seasons, are like the teeth of sabre-toothed tigers, or like the welcoming gables of a Buddhist cave in Ajanta.

Everything is a noun or an adjective, not a verb

I saw the fairies rising from the mushroom like clouds of lavender dust, slowly unfurling,

Jesus standing still and strong his two legs planted on the ground. He casts the fear from my soul. The doves alight upon his broad shoulders, violet emerald, milksweet, beige. A gypsy's scarf -- he always had to listen before having to say—thin shoulders pipe-necks dancing, glancing, peeking into his hair, beating round his ears.

The girl paused upon the dock, looking upwards at the sparkling lantern. Her shoulders round, shirt and hair bound as into a scarf woven of the Northern Light, old bandaged, frayed, coming apart at the seams, a potato sack imbued with the colour from her eyes when she glanced over them like violets sparking from a hidden, mill weed field, jade and young water reed spade, breast of hummingbird, splaying fern,

They said: "Here was a girl who travelled through many lands and had crossed many seas on the wings of an eagle, the feathers of cloud and snow, in a chariot of rain and whorls of wind and autumn leaves blowing igniting into flame. "

Rizwana sat with her sisters in a circle of light, , the flames rushing from the space between her toes, warming their bodies with the flush of rose-milk stirred by the emerald, sun lit leaves of the jasmine.

It has opened; the channel of the day has opened.

I see the white branches

The expansive sea, spreading and flowing into the conch shell. The conch shell chambered, one for heaven, one for hell, and one for purgatory. The iris blue, cornflower blue, leaking indigo sea, blue like the shaded poison of Nagin, like the sunya (zero) sky blue of the hill-man's skin, the rain-blue iridescent body of the gambolling lord Krishna, rushing into the shell like Abraham's blessing, dyeing its iridescent grooves in degrees, the woven threads of Joseph's cloak, beetroot, sap, mehendi, henna, violet, shining disc corn, bursting the delicate veils of its silken sheaths, glowing like fine pine hair, shining in streams of haze

I can read back to the time when I was a foetal acorn, or to the time when I was a sucked-in, wizened crone, her wrinkles split in the star-signs of her destiny, her kismet, her silver moon-strand hairs tracing the strands of its paths, her palms chasing the lines of its brightness. I have come forward so there is no looking forward, no going back, unless and when I want to , to repair sad things.

The spreading scarf of the sea, wrapping her red strands, dawn curls in a wet, shimmering, scalloping, shimmying wet bed net, streaks of emerald, angel fish and sea-weed flowing, (surging) underneath her veins, her skin the pale cleanness of air or the misty haint-like fog of a pouring, burning morning.

Rizwana took her sister, put her hands on her two cheeks, and then her shoulders and her neck and her back, then her waist and belly and shoulder blades, saying, let me transfer my dreams to you as I whisper into your ears and salve your eyes. She had sat in the tent last evening from light until dark, from when the slanting light of day, lime washed and bright, to the berry-like ink-ness of twilight,

Shone in the threaded strands of her skirt, the dip between her long thighs and the valley beneath her feather light arms.

When suddenly, the lightness in her arms began to shake, curved lightly as they were, resting straight upon her sack and upon her long-boned thighs, between which a valley of her skirt, lit and shaded in the spun moonlight and daylight, in the hollow of the gathering dusk

The air was the white of salt, the hue of blood and snow, or the hue of rose and milk, of a snare of branches, gnarly, knotting, snarling, carbuncles cracked with bursting leaves, silver spangled, sky-washed, open with peach-blossoms and pink of a nail above the moon crest, the bright orange of flamingos in the shimmying fresh-water dawn

Bid her good-bye like the fresh tips of emerging leaf-buds,

Breathing upon her and into her, the trajectories of starlight, slanting as a leaning ladder, an evanescent stair

Upon which angels tread, its woof sparkling with the dew-sprayed, gem-pierced jewellery of their soaring supporting wings, sunshine, jay-blue, lavender, flitting with the rosy blink of eyelids pierced through by relentless needles of morning half worn, half withered, lined like a diamond cut, cashew's stew dried and stuck with beaten down silver, like a peeling mirror lake, or gushing chiffon, wraithlike veiled stream.

Unfolded like a petalled orchid, veined like an epiphytic vine,

Her body was grape-like, filled with juices that were spraying her with jamun dark acid on the guilty nails, effervescent citrus, cooling and drying in dashes and touches of freshness as it evaporated.

Their frame was wraithlike, enervated by the shock of her sight, the vision of what she saw, she dragged her finger-tips thickly along the waved, cow-dung floor, lines coming together like prismatic chutes, , thick like raising dough bread, , yeasty bubbles and fibres thin and whispering pushing aside the rustling cloak of air, , robin's egg, lime and porphyric magma, a blowing curtain, joseph's curtain, Joseph's billowing lot/ garment cast upon the high weather vein, straining, strands liberated, upstanding like a mermaid's locks, lightning spools, seaweed washed, salt-weathered.

The sparkles in the leaves flashing needles, mineral cracking steams. Her goose-flesh sucked her feet turning like a mynah's wings angling,

Gold threads for branches, Vulcan, sunny strands, volcanic sprays, and sparrows, arrowed ways, molten filaments, turning phalanges of magma,

Tingling moans, nail-bright, cloud trails flamingo feathered, aching tears, sighing groans,

Biting lips, leaves painted in a cross, gorse, thistle, purple grown opal gleams

A singing, searing pain, a lemongrass swoon

In spun wheat, dragonfly sweeps, lavender and bottle-brush green, dung-beetle bright

Shining sweet, braided, jute feathered, russet wound

The way strands or greets of hair, when braided, mountain valleys meet in interlocking spurs, counted glens and braes, kissing, avian, scale to scale

My wrist crossed, jaded with blood, aches,

Homaira's eyes like transparent marbles scouring the skies, the makeshift shacks around,

Her coolness emerging from a still pool. Bathing with light her snow-like, (angel?) wraith form

A daisy in the blue sky wind flying

Or the sun's wheel suspended, casting slanting rays of broad and slender icicles upon the singing high field

Gleams shining through her fingers like breaths,

Moon soft/milk beams

As she stepped into the stream, she saw her feet and ankles waver, shimmering clouds disintegrating, fraying and melting in a high breeze, {commentary- cotton candy wet popping}

The hard splint, rose like an apple breaking, shattering, the pain in her toe like a blade

Sparkles, mineral mountain fizz darting from her toes like a diamond gleams {or the North Star of venus streams/ straying like a hair dividing, or splitting into smithereens

The teeth within her skull like elephant's tusks or opal knives, her breath misting like tingling chimes

She came out like a sparrow from a nest, hay in her hair, song in her breast, a bird pecking through her chest

And she turned her face upward to meet the tree, her nose slanting, chin lancing, cheek glancing

Her cheeks flattening and her nose lengthening, she turned her face sideways like a fish bending in the curved and gushing river

An empty page is the best thing I have ever seen in my life

The scudding clouds taking flight

The fire of the stars is in her fingers

The gauzy reins in her palms

The girl's kindness will not be forgotten.

A tale that needs to be written

Cary's uncle gave them molasses and tea, but beatings and no food. In the morning, she went to reap rise with her mother The pain in her fingertips so intense as to be sometimes unbearable. Her palms were like by-ways and worm-holes of stars, her noon-day shadow on the hard earth like a casuarina's graceful shade

Needles-striking through her fingers

The bursts of a supernova enervating her toes

Her uncle was contracted under the American Firm for growing Bananas. They were using land that once had been spring green, fairy beautiful rainforest

Piercing sparkles of light in her toes and her arches

But the desire for more money and honour had corrupted him.

In many ways she looked back on her life with amusement

For it had been a training ground

A walking ground in a whirl

The dawn's dust congealing, coagulating

A crow's call like a graceful fall of water pouring from height to depth, curved like the graceful neck of a swan.

Rizwana's anklets burning copper in the sunshine, her teeth glowing like abalone shells Hanging up the washing Gypsies our policy is to roam, either in mind or in body when we are hungry. Her hair streaming shining like straw-berry, copper and rose, her ratty kerchief, straw apple, raw vine green, pulling, pulling the cow that had first fallen into the stream. She set it down on the bank, kicking, its hooves in the air as it scrambled upright, she wiped it down with a towel to get rid of the mud and slime to bring forth its glow again

Pain shot through her fingers, her arms as she trod, through the pale ivy green moss clod, starved of winter sunshine.

Hanging up the washing, arms, long, slender, cool, reflecting the blue of the sky in their rosy dawn like ripening peaches, or pale, sun-kissed grapes. Freckling shrivelling light

"Turn the lights on, keep me from turn to stone,

Shining when I'm alone" – (Ellie Goulding, from "Lights")

Seraphs sing, they move, they rise with the dawn that alights cold fire

Silver cheeks her neck swinging like a chain of bananas

She was speaking to the child No one but God can see you. I don't exist. If I see you, it is only his eyes that see. Her pantaloons grimy and dust covered reflected in the lake

But what do you see? I see the leaf trickle and fall. I see the dog trotting and laughing

The butterfly with spangled wings, the leaf whispering on the sand, its stem curved swoon, the grapevine dry and rusting fragile like the pendants of an earring

Light, dainty, dancing,

Floating, foaming, prancing

She was like a jasmine flower, bending and swaying with the wind, her very nostrils were like its sweetest scent. The cherry blossoms adrift upon the sea, like a grown girl's cheeks, flaming and burning, molten chambers where ice met fire, and spewed their mineral sharp resurgence in the hanging curtains of magenta, watery and cloudy cornflower blue, indigo and shocking violet, and frosty pine, grass, ivy, hanging fern, ivy, swaying bean pole creeper

Sweeper, indigo reaper

How do their gardens grow

Her dark rose hair cast like flying seaweed or birds hay nest bits flying and twirling upon the wind

Her stalks are fresh and spring-like, a young sapling, the stars like tiny flowers on moist, misty moss-cloaked trunks on the North side of a tall poplar, straight and reaching to the sky, rending the winds, and wet welkin woof

Her hands were like fairy ferns or blue striped starling, lotuspetals, sparks of pollen flying

You are not weak, but very, very strong.

-→"I seek the Christ," she said, I seek the Christ child she said, as she wrapped the orchid patterned scarf round the locks of her hair, curly black bulrushes, raspberry carbuncles, bunches of dark grapes, billowy banana seeds, popping in the air like sacrificial smoke.

We shall rebuild."

Strong like your father when he leans down a ravine, strained against the jay-grey blue slate sky, drifted scudding clouds

The bandages round his raw wounds of legs like criss-crossing grooves of suffering, burning, wetness of pain; butcher's pink, raw, salved.

His love like the rosy dawn hue, paled by the golden daisy, caressing your fingers, the rush of the river drawing up from your soles

His banks ravaged by pine needles (fresh and cooling), pestle fine like the meteor dust, basted, slammed, alluvial, crystalline sand

The shooting arc of icicles, bubbles sparkling, cracking

The foam capped waves, coursing at her like cream coloured ponies prancing and galloping, their tails and their manes whipped, forked, stroked, split, brushed soft splitting, parsing, hooves striking sparks form stone, from the sweet combed beach, like a mirror shattering in webbed shards; their seaweed criss-crossing their opened wounds, their stinging exposed flesh like sharp nets, salted on their hide,

The silver hair gleaming like platinum, the diadem of trilobites, snails, starfish and lobsters playing in a circle, with the writhing jellyfish, her soles infused by needles, the bridges of her foot warm with lather, milk wine bubbles, her calves giving off a peat-like, moss-shielded heat.

Splaying like the bones of a starfish clawing the brine soaked dun hay crumbling sand castle

Doves, arches, domes, curtains, lifting, daylight, dawn. Wheat, oil, rose, jasmine, eucalyptus water, brackish, sweet, calm; drafting

“Lord, can you hear me speak?”

“I fought for you, and I never recovered.”

“You may talk about the battle of Gideon, Gideon, Gideon, you may talk about the battle of Gideon, when the walls came tumbling down.

The cherry blossom tree has bloomed. And everything, every moment of life is a gift from the creator! And he blooms your fingers.

“A person who is severely handicapped never knows his own hidden strength until he is treated like a normal human being and to be allowed to be supported to shape his own life for life is either a challenge or nothing at all.

To Helen Keller: “The one who walked the distance of a lifetime without fear, that darkness a challenge to the soul, and silence is a language we must learn, that we are tested in the crucible of circumstances to know our inner strengths, to break our own paths that will make the way, from small beginnings to still greater things.”

“I had a way then, of losing it, all on my own/ I had a heat then/But the queen has been overthrown/ And I’m not sleeping now, the dark is too hard to beat/ And I’m not keeping the strength I need to push me

You show the lights that stop me from turn to stone, you shine them when I’m alone, And so I tell myself that I’ll be strong/And dreaming when they’re gone/ Cause they’re calling, calling, calling me home, Calling calling, calling me home

Noises I play within my head? Touch my own skin and hope I’m still breathing And I think back to when my brother and my sister slept In an unlocked place, the only time that I feel safe”

Everything is like a wick without oil.

You are not weak, but very, very strong. You are an angel with a traping band wrapped round your feet, straps on your ankles. Your shins are whale bones, ribs, tusks, your knees are graceful and light. Calves round and flexing like melting wax by the flint made fire, the explosive gasoline of your God-given flight, and the burning trails, the flaring drapes and the searing tracks that you disperse, distribute, cast out with your wings

The grass like a fawn’s down, spotted like a snake’s diamond scales

Don’t miss the forest for the trees.

The gypsy girl ordered the child, as she was cooking, to clean and wash the clay vessels in the nearby stream. Then she silenced him, putting her long-fingered nail on his gleaming lip. Shush, live for today. There is no such thing as tomorrow. But if you will live on less today, the day will be longer. (Know also there is nothing and everything that you do not know. Once it is inside you and you feel it, it is yours, but when you are afraid of it, it will ever remain outside of you. That is why, you must completely live in the moment.

Two men pulling carts, one young, one old, wire veined, wizened, sun-black.

Live everyday as new, and everytime as it were a separate one coming apart, and never worry what anything looks like.

Your ears are coming forward like funnels of cloud, waiting for the pourings of lightning and of rain. Your eyes like wells thirsting for water. Hers was a beauty running from a lack of care, gemmy bridled

Face of Zaid:

He walked on two legs as thin as calipers, little sticks you use to cast into the bonfire. And his face was like kindlewood, too. Light slid, railed, tilted, streaked, grained like a snatch of leather, floating ivy, wind. He hugged her when she passed. She was the orange haired wench, a wrench skit in the scabbard of her hip, a curtsey in her walk. Her face was an opening violet, veiled by her auric, misting breath, her neck was an aspen branch, gauzed by the fuzz of a rising lightning leaf, picking its ears to the rose petal, blushing plum pearl, mixed sheep wool dawn, with coffee poured into her coif with milk sap and sweet guttation,

Russet braided, thimble eyed, sweet pea thumbed, eyelash crumbed

She clung on and would not let go.

At the bonfire later. Maple leaves twirling , the sparks curling. He said to her, hang clear, clear eyed wench. You're a flowing river,

Her, hang clear, clear eyed wenchYou're afloating whirl, He said to her, hang clear, clear eyed wench You're a flowing whirl. Of Seaweed, you're a windchime. She said to him, your're the North Star, the Esther flower on the rhizomes in a wintry sun-blown, wind withered, ice touched moss forest

And then sultry, she turned to him and said, "Your hands are like a hawk's back; your legs trail and track; your forearm is a long scar of shocks and shunts and lightning bars

And he said to her, I see the setting sun in the palm of your hand, it streams and glows like a crazy lemon, burning sulphur brand, Venusian wisp, crisp, lisp,

Violet flares in your hair strands, hard iodine subliming steaming smoking galvanized zinc gleams, I see your fingers crossed in a sardine blood brother band; Emerald magenta, heaven sway your swing you shake the land.

"Oh, tease you me," she said. "I'm afraid I ride away on my horses with the flying flipping fire mane she says. "You certainly do," he says. "Little streak of sunshine, iris bell blue

I wrap your strands round my trembling, aching fingers, constricting them like rings, pressing and marring them like nets scarring a fish, a dolphin thumping and dashing and slapping against a turning map of light. I caress the sides of your back and of my forearms with my nails, and my palms and I aint got no qualms, she said, pearly shifting moon crests, iridescent shells, scallops, scoured, veiled, (snailed?). Screaming, leaning, squirming, heyin'. Neighing, swaying.

"I ain't no great beauty like that, you know, she said. "I ain't no great beauty like that, she said, but I do got love." O Palanhare → and silence is the beauty of the screech. "But I got recognition from you guys," she said

A fire bird, stretching out her wings, ruffling her feathers and combing them with her sharp beak. Flying over the frozen lake, singeing the surface with their heat, so that is melts and forms pools on the frozen, snowy ice. She in a gust of cold wind, alights on a persimmon tree, rustles, dripping oil like a burning lantern among the shining autumn leaves.

Winter, spring, summer, autumn, each present in each-other like morsels in the mouth, or the chalice of a hibiscus holding nectar and perfume and an anthill at the same time, or like waves of warm air rising in a cold atmosphere, forming pockets and funnels of changing temperature and melting wind.

A growing, rising evergreen with needles blue, grey, green, fresh juniper scent in the frosty biting air that casts itself on your nostrils, a singeing peppery scent.

Asmara walked out of her temporary shelter, or should we say "crawled" as its doorway was four feet tall. It was about to rain.

She saw a shape coming towards her in the rain and it was Anna. She brightened up immediately, shining with a bright light, lit from within.

"I have been studying that creature Marx," she said. "About how primitive communism allowed people to discover their species being. How patriarchy didn't exist, and women didn't have to bow in deference to men, but wove and washed and worked with their heads held high, like seagulls flying, stretching their wings out on gusts of air.

"I have been wringing my hands with wrack and toil, just as Marx describes," said Anna, opening her palms to the sky for Asmara to see. Although she was young, they were wrinkled.

Next time you have some work, come and fetch me, and I will help you," she said to Anna.

"Perhaps, thank you," said Anna, straightening her back and her torn, worn grey smock. She rubbed her hands together as though rinsing them.

"I am in the mood for dancing," she said, looking happier.

"Come, let's do a four step," she said, stamping in place and clicking imaginary castanets.

"Searing is the sound of the conch blowing, in the depths of my soul," whispered Anna and Asmara together, as they lapped in place. They curved and swirled their arms and fingers in *aarati* like spirals from their hips out to in-front of their shoulders to above the crowning flare of the funnel, the souls above their heads, parallel lines of force being used like trapezes or balancing beams in the crooks of their elbows, from which they catapulted into the world of the spry-nosed acrobat, the trainee of the village trapeze artist.

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My wring and my bracelet, a circle of suds round my wrist and fingers, they really were, really was a burning coals, sudding bubbles, soaping lye from the beautiful pert scrubbing that I pulled on clothes when I was washing them. It flit. It flint, it split like a thousand logs spraying, fraying, their whitewood in splinters round the coal black, soil ash, auburn dust. Split into two neat paved, moss pine, winnowing mellowing screwelling maple, strands, honey hands

Rough bark, leaves spark, stark five perk sure, five pointed, lantern bottomed,, veined, splayed, peppered, rustling, husking, cedars singeing, slammed

And seven shelves of trellised land, dark, emerald leaved, elvin eared, corn stark, barley sheaved, ebony stripped, gleaming thorny reeved, pointed

____Flowing, molten, glowing, bubbling, trickling, gurgling

Sunlight weaved and water stroked, fingerprint sheen and harbour cloaked.

Bowing Swilling, bending arching, reeds combed by the wind. Bowing swilling, filaments/circulating, feathers screeing, brushing, howling, yowling, meowing turning curving

Scrubbed, brushed curving, twirling, Turetting, trotting, galloping, swirling, Burning, jangling, hanging, cascading, Filigreed, pending, swinging, shading, grading, Ringing, turning, swooping, fading

Shivering, whooshing, swishing

Tempered mother of pearl/hanging morning star Curling swishing brushing, disintegrating, Fizzling . snapping, snaring

Venus pouring forth its graces like a lemon's fragrance rising from its million pores in marmalade clouds fragrance thinning, hair blowing streaking foam

Rizwana the gypsy girl had a chest of zig-zagging bones, a cage of vines, tightened by the twists of water used to rinse the gleaming dust from the branches of her doorframe, singed with soot. Her hair was the zig-zag of lightning streaking across an even brighter blazing sky, roaring and burning,, wound around a green twisting and curling seaweed, bursting spring pod, like a pea string but longer, gleaming, nestled among the downy yellow leaves, the side of her face, heated by the sun

The whirling breakers of a leaf, dust in nose-dry, twirling neon pine cones

A jade green, sea grey floating leaf, next to a wooden piece of broken down house, or arc frame, or weathered cross

A netted leaf/Two strands of a Spider web gleaming between the leaf and the supporting beam

Another small emerald leaf beside it and three coin like ones, and then a twisted up, puckered like crumbling white, curly red cue like a twisted, gash-shaped seed pod that looked as a wound

Mouldy powder vine, braided, whisked by a an ageing, mellowing, sharp tangy broken leaf, down feathers on the other side of the cross beam

All surrounded by a sea of jade and silver and amber, , drying, withering, shrivelling cold, straightening themselves and pouring out their skeletons, standing alert and erect, casting off the veils of spirit wrapping them as they moved, charged from within

Moonshine Rizwana pouring water out from a blue and platinum pitcher, a diamond dipper, out in twisting streams, tinkling like the rush of the cold wind in the tall mountain trees

The flash of coonskin, racoon sassy furry warm brown, twisting like a snake, squatting, rolling, kneading with her knuckles and bony fingers the stretching dough for a rising, scorching, lengthening, double

Rizwana's night jasmine in her hair, crow's talonned feet, smoke pipes for a neck and the mist of distance and the shimmer of swelling shores, surging, tugged lodestone sweep of the ocean rushing, draining azure from the magnetic mussel sheen coral shell sky

Rainbows shining through the starred veils of her lashes The angel of the sun, walking out of the descending ripples, the eagle grey and jay blue turquoise of the sky.

The angel swinging and fluttering, lowing and crooning, a high sweep voice like harp, a deep, strung, searing pear, mellow and breaking and shivering and shuddering open to the harp-shaped, sprout hollow black seeds piercing downward to claw dirt fog clawed eleven opal shells, ringing like grown, leeping peas in a pod, round the burning halo

Rizwana took the child into the full light of the noon-day raisin sun and kissed his hurts and applied the salve, a mixture of dirt, grit, and her own and the boy's spit.

He curled unto himself, oozing the pain from his arm as a serpent would draw venom, sucking back into his fangs, marvelling at the healing and the pain, as the sunlight and the wind seemed to draw spindles of bitter snow and water

Rizwana also had …

Her arms toiling like snow-melts on the mountains, rivers of water, running down the glacier and channelling it, cutting granite mangroved pathways dendritic, unspooling, unravelled

Her parents, hard working, webbed feet toiling, spinning sunlight into warmth, cloud into raiment, rainbows into rafters,

Kaatjie → chopping an onion and tossed it into the pot, the girl standing next to her, arms limp, crying about her boyfriend

"Ah, for –'s sake, don't let him do that to you," she told her, an arm on her shoulder. The girl perked up immediately

Elvin

O my dear, proprietress of the emerald falls, protectress of the peacock blue, the swaying eyelet circle, piercing gimlet sight, like a needle rattle throat; O lord of the swaying grace, the swirling, swilling milling rain and wind; the garments spinning billowing like spraying dust, o lord of the continuous chain of breath, misting cloud, rising from the mossy, mill-weed choked, olive and swordfish pool

O lord of the thrashing piper/ swallow eel/ flounder of the soft aggregate scales between which lichens lodge, lice and grouses house and browse, O lord of the suspended hummingbird, of the bright parrot, fresh as an unripe papya, screaming, crying, its wings spinning and its tail flicking, like an axle funnel;

O lord of the hanging chasms of light, yawning and gloaming like fathomless caverns draped with stalagmites and stalactites, of the golden and lavender veils of waterfall mist rising from the rushing river and treacherous catarchts, petunia, cobalt, silverfish, sun-kissed ivy

There is a time when you decide you are scared no more.

The turning elves, cavorting with the rustling mid-morning light, the screening, screeching crows, swooping and cawing and diving in flight, the fairies swirl, like billowing feathers in an eddying wind, the swans curl and soar over swilling water, whisking, cresting, curling, quenching in an inky lake

Seven times fashioned and folded from the arc of a

Standing up, she saw that the shrubs infront of her had cleared with light. The gulmohar tree bent and twisted its arms up to the abalone sky lagoon, its twigs whirling and stoking, shone white and pomegranate purple, streaked with bird dropping, its pods hung like a tangle of scabbards, interlaced and strung with filigrees of silver peepul leaves and drooping platinum shoots and tendrils. In front of it, the graceful guava tree raised its dusty, fang shaped leaves to the light, its bark crisped and lichened, some smooth brown, black wet patches encrusted as it were with barnacles, or nicked spots where the jewel bright phloem shone through {shady umbrella plants appendages riffling} A fly scudding along the rafter, rubbing his arms together

The leaves rustled like doves roosting, crooning and cooing, clucking and sighing, or skirting jasmines flowing, white slices of mango and crisp jamun jade , katydid bitterness

Absolute responsibility of teachers for a pupil

The number of whom must be odd.

A second, furry gulmoahr sending its trellised compound suncatchers in streaks, its arms and trunk gnarly, dry, flashing to the earth like a bolt of lightning unyolked, the peepul tree like a woman in her graceful fineries of waterfall for hair, ferns for jewel, and furry, downy arms

Hanging dewy gossamer webs she exuded as a happy light

As the elf stepped into this world, he played in the lap of it, and she delighted in the stirring of its skirts, strung as they were with tangerines, peas and suns and moons

She rose, she made three paces of the garden grove She rolled the rocking of the sea, her hips the billowing of the heavy netted foam, rising and falling like a crashing tonne of wood, cascading across a breakers in an avalanche of blowing, skinning zephyrs. Her walk would quench your thirst. "Shall I take thee on my wings," she said to the land where the sun never sets, and the stars gleam, brightly on the frigid ice? She asked. Her cheeks were ruddy like blood on snow or white petals kissed with cherry wine, her body adrift but on course like a pair of doves fluttering and holding a splendid sprig between them

They looked up at the swilling blue sky and saw the hawks swilling around, like a taut bow poised for shooting an arrow of the sun's gleams, banded by black in the centre where the nose of the flight winds would rest, or the slipstream would buffet, and the curve of its wings like bent arches of chestnut, fashioned and striped with hazel-wood, or the sprinkle of powdered cinnamon. They turned in the powdery iris blue like spears of amethyst, weathervanes, chisels of topaz, crowning the brows and the gleaming temples of the sky's wind worn, rain-washed face;

Her hair was surrounded then by twelve stars of various shapes, one a pentangle, the other like a spider's web, the other like the gleam at the tip of an icicle, the other like …

And then she prepared food for them both, oat and wild grain, green and black lentil sprouts dotted each one by a cream and ivory eye. The grass sparkles like crowning minarets, emerald, young water trembling, delicate, dried grass arranged in a circle like a maiden's wind swept, wet, sun-spooled hay strung/ spun hair quivering like wisps or slivers in the stirring, magically cool and tranquil breeze.

And in everything the maid was sweet obedience and generosity, and gentleness, and compliance, and her soul within flowed like thawing slipping mountain streams and running slipping snow melts and resurgent spring fountains, and kneeling prayer, and simple sacrifice, and happy labour, and joyful fellowship.

Ever foreward, the flame of silver nad tangerine orange darting, the swathing bud of the morning's dawn, shading, swallowing, like a phoenix, spindling the strands and embers of an autumn's cinder block, the turning shirt tails of a quaffing, quacking duck, a hiding, shimmering quail.

The house keeping people laying out clothes, tye dyed, indigo, emerald, cool jasmine foliage, flyting, fluttering, rucked, swept, flowing.

Summer's grasses waving, growing up to the sky as homes for grasshoppers, popping here and there, and crickets whirring. The rocky paved edge of a bridge on which is built a gate, from which you can look into a stream. Over the stream which runs over glassy, mossy, hard edged stones, eroding them, as many minnows and tadpoles float and nourish themselves in small pools, on the skirts of the river. Growing trees and logs line the skipping water, a jackal suns itself on a leaning stump, its brushy tail like a broom or a many layered pinecone, switching from left to right and North to South.

A kiwi hued, jackfruit and custard apple textured wall, covered with ageing moss. Growing out of it, across the vault of heaven, an apple tree shaped jasmine bush, gnarled and knotted, its roots reaching deep into the bricks and mortar and plaster of the wall and cracking it, its branches reaching like flying buttresses of a church to hold up the sky.

Some of the beauty of frugality of eating on a happy day is that it allows you to concentrate on a beautiful past and present without worrying about the future, of how one will pay the debts one will incur by overeating, or how one will tide through the future, whether it will be as beautiful as the past. Eating frugally in the present is a way of thanking God for what is and what has been, rather than always being greedy for more. One must keep one's health up, though. Do that by staying in touch with family, teaching those who need to be taught, and reading, and well as breathing good fresh air and walking sturdily out in the open.

The Lord has given us such a blue and beautiful sky, clear and true, and of diverse hue, like the fibres of an onion, or the veils of a bean-pod, adhering to one another and separated by the paring knives of the wind, blowing like parakeet feathers, shone through and veined vascular like leaves.

Come! Come to the Garden of Eden! To Paradise, to Firdaus and I shall tell you everything that is necessary to bring. Love is the basis of the whole law, every precept is built on that. "Those, who through love and truth, where no misgiving is, rely Upon the genial sense of youth: Glad Hearts! without reproach or blot;
who do thy (duty's) work and know it not. Oh! if through confidence misplaced/They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power! (Duty) around them cast

"Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!
O Duty! if that name thou love
Who art a light to guide, a rod
To check the erring, and reprove;
Thou, who art victory and law
When empty terrors overawe;
From vain temptations dost set free;
And calm'st the weary strife of frail humanity!

There are who ask not if thine eye
Be on them; who, in love and truth,
Where no misgiving is, rely
Upon the genial sense of youth:
Glad Hearts! without reproach or blot;
Oh! if through confidence misplaced
They fail, thy saving arms, dread Power! around them cast
.

(William Wordsworth, 1807)

And then our poems:

Duty, beauty go together,

Shells and seaside blow together

Flames in lanterns crawl and stutter

Never let anyone stall your calling

Always walk abroad with butter

Spread on cheeks to stop the wind from skinning them

Or from dewing them up with tears from the chafing cold

Like lilies with drops of rain

Bobbing in the breeze.

You are un-stoppable, like that current of storm

That snakes past the flower and

Winnows the leaves and petals."

We have to think, really, what is one's duty. It is to provide for one's family, or to contribute in another way to supplant the needs of society, or to follow the inclinations of one's curiosity and seeking after knowledge.

The mountainside opens like a glen or canyon, made visible by the passing of a mist, the lifting of a cloud, or the opening of the doors of the rain.

Rosepetals nod on the green slopes, fluttering grass is pinned in place, with deep, penetrating and widespread roots which anchor the soil in a deep network, its long blades splaying and turning in the wind, the braid of wheat-like seeds piercing the tender wedge of the sky, the gelid welkin, like arrows or spears.

As a spoke of the wheel pierces the ground, the shovel of coal pierces the plasma of fire, or the sunlight pierces the cobweb in the un-swept corner of the hut in the margins of farmland,

Swinging back and forth, swans, ducks, egrets, and geese, gliding on huge breathy gusts; turbulent cloud and feathery cumulus, rising currents of wind and buffeting bulwarks of bison's snorting breath, the mane catch of tossing mares, and the slipstream of feathered wings of parrots…

'And the Lord said, "Let the Israelites attach fringes to the borders of their clothes, of blue riband, to make a sign to themselves and other peoples that they belong to the things above, to the Lord of sky and earth, and that they are the sky people.

The Yemeni girl lifted the pail of water onto her shoulder. She was hungry and had been staring at the reflection of the clouds and grey sky it seemed, for a few hours. Out of it, a grey and black stork had come to drink, an inky crow, and even a granite coloured and sooty collared wolf.

Now, she came to the doorway of her house where was hung in-front of it, a curtain. "Mother!"

"I have brought the water!" Her mother was busy about the fire roasting their barley cakes, and she said "Good, dearie," and her baby brother crawled out from behind the curtain and waved, sat with his small clay bear and said to it,

"The time for your bathing has come."

"But, dear little David, if your bear is bathed, he will melt into mud!" exclaimed Rebecca.

"I didn't know that," he said and picked up the bear and held it close to him, as if to protect it from that fate.

"It's time for your bath, surely," said Rebecca to David.

"Indeed, it is," said their mother, heating part of the water on the fire.

"And then you will go straight to the Madrissa," she said. "Have you practiced writing your letters in the sand?"

"What shall he write?" asked Rebecca.

"Ah, nothing but letters."

"Blue for ocean, with the aquamarine tide, on which fishes and sharks swarm steered by their keel, the waves whipped up by the coursing breeze, gather and mill, fold on the blowing tent-veil of the sea, the currents clash, stopping the war boats, dash at the beach, the sandy eroded, carved and sculpted by the wind, dashed cove.

Green for emerald, the colour of date palms in Paradise, the wings of Parakeets waving feathers, casuarina's swaying and toppling, like windmills in the Oasis storm. A gathering of coconuts, strewn on the pebbly floor, a sheaf of bulgar wheat set against the fibrous roots of the coconut tree, like a maiden's hair, streaming down her neck as she stops to rest in the shade.

Yellow for sunshine, that which is not a drink, but is the best cheerer nevertheless. Honey dripping out of the comb, and the lattice of trees' silhouettes of winter branches with leaves fallen through the

air to the ground, like tears on a traveller's face, and the du'a of the traveller is always heard, and the buds and leaves and flowers surely will embalm its gnarly branches again next spring.

"We must teach him the lore of the oasis, and desert and how to decipher signs, next," she said.

Rebecca read from her textbook. "Most plants respond well to red light, absorbing it," she said. What they reflect is a mixture of blue and yellow, which in combination is green. Light of the wavelength of 600-700 nm produces the greatest elongation in stems and leaves and other plant tissues than other wavelengths.

Vernalization occurs as a result of exposure to light, to a day or hour of light in some cases, and to several consecutive days of exposure to sunlight in others. Scientists have tried to find the precise chemical that leads to vernalisation or germination, but this has proved elusive and difficult at best, it is only known that short day plants need fewer hours of sunlight to grow, and that long day plants can only grow near the equator year round, or near the poles at summer time.

Ripples in a slipping silvery black stream, bubbles gushing forth from rocks that hinder it, young papaya plants with their ten-triangle spreading elephant ear leaves reaching up to the vanishing air, dried leaves of tulip trees line the banks, young tulip saplings, bend and sway in the wind. The stream's glissades hang like a diadem upon the earth, an angel's garment hanging wraithlike upon the wind, the veils of sunlight and soap; a trout's scales thin upon its arching body, leaping from the river.

A calling and affectionate mynah, calling desperately to alert me to the signs of this day, which I must grasp in my hands and fashion into something of worth.